TIME OUT OF JOINT

Recall and Evocation in Recent Art

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Time Out of Joint

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and Jakob Schillinger

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Preface

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was." It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.

For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.
—Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 1940

Time Out of Joint examines artistic practices that employ evocation as a mode of connecting the present to the past. By *evoking*, we mean the calling forth of past emotions, desires, frustrations, and memories into the present. While the conventional approach to history is to put the past at a distance as historical fact, evocation makes the past present. The artists in this exhibition bring past and present into a constellation that transforms both; the act of evoking makes possible a rupture, a condition that challenges historical assumptions and ingrained systems of domination, on both a personal and also a wider sociopolitical scale.

In other words, how we consider history and how we conceive of the relationship of the past, the present, and the future is fundamentally entangled with structures of power. Take the rhetoric of "crisis" for example, so prevalent today, in which political leaders project images of a dark future that require the present to be sacrificed in order to avoid this impending threat. The artists in this exhibition seek, in unexpected ways, to reclaim this lost present. Through evocation they demonstrate that historical rupture does not just happen, but neither is it an idea so great and abstract that it lacks any connection to the individual and the everyday; it is latent in each moment. To recognize this latency, to understand the connection of the personal to history, is the precondition to unfolding and activating this dormant potential and to creating the possibility for radical change to occur.

Some artists in the exhibition engage with hesitation, not as a disempowering force, but rather as a means of resistance and a mode of considering and creating possibilities for change. Other artists included here are concerned with disrupting social conventions around individuality, by transforming the personal into the collective. This union of multiple voices enables collective identification and sociopolitical awareness. Artists also explore the ideological

imprints of particular places and events. The strategy of evoking a specific landmark or momentous past episode works to recall not only its own particularities, but also visits anew the potential of these incidents in the present.

Our curatorial approach is theoretically informed by Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Benjamin points out that both the functioning of power and radical change are fundamentally entangled with temporality. His concept of rupture is thus relevant with regard to the current rhetoric of crisis, in which the present has no *presence* and constantly disappears in the transition to the future. In order to bring about a rupture that thwarts the chrono-logic of crisis, one must break this suspension of the present in the name of a future, thereby transforming the present into a space of action: into "the now." This can only occur, Benjamin writes, through an act of evocation that refers the present to the past, to a history of suppressed desires and rights, and counters the invocation of a future. The act of calling forth—or *evoking*—past instances (whether these be instances of oppression and injustice, or of strength) serves to energize efforts toward change in the current moment.

We have chosen to contextualize the works of this international group of emerging artists by, in some cases, showing more than one work in order to give a sense of artist's practice rather than singling out a particular piece that "fits" the subject of the show. The exhibition thus highlights a shared mode of operating instead of simply compiling works with ostensibly similar subject matter. In this catalogue, we introduce the practice of each individual artist or collective within the specific context of the exhibition, while also elaborating on the theoretical framework of the exhibition through short entries on several key words. Each of the curators contributes an essay that further expands the implications of the exhibition: Luigi Fassi considers issues of ideology and the Gramscian concept of common sense; Lucy Gallun discusses the presence of possibility in terms of spatiotemporal conceptions; Roya Rastegar's essay parallels the Benjaminian framework of our exhibition with feminist intellectual legacies of theories of freedom and affect; and Jakob Schillinger takes up the example of artist Paul Chan to discuss the religious chrono-logic of capitalism and the emancipatory potential of art. We hope that this exhibition and catalogue open a space for viewers to relate their own experiences and desires, and put forth the persistent possibility of radical change.

Artists

Fikret Atay

Fikret Atay was born in Batman, Turkey. He continues to work in his Kurdish hometown (though, he says, "it is practically impossible to produce art" there), demonstrating his concern with the ideological imprint of a place and how it bears on the lives of its inhabitants. Throughout his practice, aiming to penetrate daily life, he portrays Batman's youths engaged in activities that could seem strange and opaque to anybody not familiar with the local culture and history, but which nevertheless convey a ghostly presence of the past. For example, in *Rebels of the Dance* (2002), two Kurdish boys seek shelter in an ATM booth, where they begin to perform what seem to be traditional folk songs and dances. These songs, however, don't have proper lyrics. They are, by necessity, improvised, taking on the form of nonlinguistic singsong. Such improvisation introduces something unexpected and unstable within an oppressive regime: expressions of Kurdish culture were prohibited in Turkey until 1946, and even after that, Kurds have continued to endure severe oppression. In performing this attempt at tradition, the boys strive to connect their present to the past, and thus, to a collective history. It is a moment of empowerment and community that belongs to a different kind of power than the one associated with politics and organization: a latent force that Atay calls the "depth of the time in the moment." In *Rebels of the Dance*, the temporal movement of evocation is overlaid with one of hesitation: this is embodied in the inhibited performance that builds an enormous tension and—much more importantly—potential.

Fikret Atay, still from *Rebels of the Dance*, 2002
Video, color, sound; 10:52 minutes

Kader Attia

On an Algerian shore, massive concrete blocks pile, clustered in the sand. The local youths call this beach "Rochers Carrés" ("Square Rocks"), and in a series of photographs by the same name produced in 2008 by Kader Attia, the French artist of Algerian descent surveys this environment of assembled gray, sandy blocks and the vast expanses of blue sea and sky beyond them. In the artist's observation, these cubic forms seem to mimic the ubiquitous and persistent forms of the housing edifices of the *banlieue* of the outer zones of Paris, where Attia grew up. The artist goes on to posit that the young Algerians who sit amongst these colossal forms and gaze out across the sea may not be thinking only of their present lives in the city of Algiers, but that they might also be contemplating that place across the Mediterranean—Europe—and their dreams of the "better" lives that may be found there. Spending time in France and Algeria allows Attia to perceive a myriad of social and cultural characteristics of both locales, and to draw apt comparisons, such as the one between the positions of the young people who gather at Rochers Carrés and those in the Parisian suburbs—the struggles faced by both, the questioning of hope for the future—which offers a sensitive juxtaposition of lived experiences.

Spatiotemporal constellation has been a consistent mode of address for Attia. In his practice, including works on paper, sculpture, photography, and large-scale installation, Attia mines the experiential dimensions of place, exploring specific ritual and cultural artifacts that also imply comparisons among current and historical societies. Through repetitive formal motifs and charged symbols, Attia explores notions of community and belonging. His works recall memories and desires associated with particular places and moments, and at the same time they reference the resonating effects of experience across perceived spatial and temporal boundaries.

Kader Attia, *Rochers Carrés*, 2008 (details)
Nine chromogenic prints, 20 1/8 x 29 7/8 in. (51 x 76 cm) each

Yael Bartana

Raucous yelps and exclamations comprise the soundtrack of *Wild Seeds* (2005), a video by the Israeli artist Yael Bartana. These howls are accusations and quick cries for relief or mercy, voiced by participants in a role-playing game, "The Evacuation of Gilad's Colony." Outdoors, on lush hills that evoke Biblical descriptions of the Promised Land, young adults assume two sides: two are authorities, working to remove the others, who are settlers, from the occupied territories. The youths that Bartana employs for each "team" are pacifists who don't identify with the roles assigned to them here, but nonetheless they are able to imagine themselves into this violent scenario. As they tear clothes and grab one another, they fling out verbal accusations and labels, developing expressions of these assumed identities.

Wild Seeds in America (2008–09), part of the exhibition, brings the game to the United States. After discussing the context of the original *Wild Seeds*, local participants restage the game in New York City, exploring how cultural rituals may be experienced in the present environment, even when their spatiotemporal contexts have shifted.

Tradition, identity, and nation-building have consistently been themes of Bartana's practice. In *Summer Camp* (2007), she juxtaposes Helmar Lerski's 1935 Zionist propaganda film, *Avodah*, with her own film, which chronicles the reconstruction of a Palestinian home by members of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. In *Trembling Time* (2001), Bartana emphasizes the collective suspension of activity that takes place on Israel's Memorial Day: on a busy Tel Aviv highway, cars pause in their lanes, and drivers open their doors and stand quietly on the roadway. As these drivers commemorate Israel's war dead and recall the past, Bartana draws out through slowed motion and manipulated shadows the potency of the moment.

Yael Bartana, *Wild Seeds in America*, 2008–09
Performance, October 19, 2008, Union Square, New York,
as part of the exhibition *OURS: Democracy in the Age of Branding*,
curated by Carin Kuoni, Sheila C. Johnson Design Center,
Parsons The New School for Design

Ronnie Bass

American artist Ronnie Bass presents, in a variety of media, abstract narratives, often performed by the artist himself and his friends in a highly idiosyncratic, campy aesthetic. Distributing one discombobulating and surreal story over the two videos included in this exhibition, *2012* and *The Sky Needs You Too* (both 2008), Bass isolates and juxtaposes different temporalities in allegorical vignettes. For example, the second video shows two different scenes: the protagonist and his colleague handling a dough mixer, and a strange musical performance by all the characters. Two temporalities are juxtaposed here: the accumulative notion of progress (in which time is homogenous, continuous, empty, and must be filled by work for steady advancement), exemplified by the manual labor of the colleague who later dies from a work-related accident and never gets to redeem the fruits of his labor, and a messianic end of history, reuniting the characters in a state of harmony.

In his practice, Bass works through what seem to be symptomatic questions, desires, fears, and hopes: he illustrates the conflicting desires for individual autonomy and security on the one hand, and collective identification and interdependence on the other. He traces a search for empowerment and an ambivalence regarding the promise of success through individual efforts. Bass's characters experience alienation from hierarchically organized and compartmentalized labor, and they overcome the isolating force of contemporary society through friendship, collegiality, and affiliation. Empowerment through collective identification is the leitmotif of these strange narratives; its various articulations make graspable the fundamental connection between conceptions of time and the actions and relationships of people.

Ronnie Bass, stills from *2012*, 2008
Video, color, sound; 4 minutes

Ronnie Bass, still from *The Sky Needs You Too*, 2008
Video, color, sound; 8 minutes

Johanna Billing

The practice of Swedish artist Johanna Billing is characterized by a sense of loss and fragility, in which temporality is suspended or rendered ambiguous. In her video works, Billing portrays people in concentrated, unresolved situations, without giving any precise indications about the context of those situations. The narratives move between past and present, rendering both unstable and undetermined, and relying upon the meaning imparted by the viewer.

Where She Is At (2001) is shot outside of Oslo at a run-down leisure center that is one of the few remaining pieces of functionalist architecture from the 1930s in Norway. A young woman climbs a diving tower and stands hesitantly at the edge. She faces a physical challenge of jumping into the abyss, which itself is emblematic of a feeling of deep loneliness in the face of an unknown future. The work becomes an allegory of hesitation, in which the artist connects the depiction of a personal dilemma to a larger historical frame.

Another work included in the show, *Project for a Revolution* (2000), is inspired by the sequence opening of Michelangelo Antonioni's classic film *Zabriskie Point* (1970), which explores the contradictions of student riots in the United States during the 1960s. Billing's own video presents a group of young people gathered in what might be a university lecture hall, waiting passively for something to happen. None of them speaks, and nothing breaks the atmosphere of expectation for the entire duration of the video. The work offers an ambiguous double meaning: the possible revolutionary action enabled through thought and hesitation, or the disempowering paralysis that affects youth, which leads to a cynical outlook in regards to the prospect for revolution. The notion of uncertainty is central in the artist's exploration of the possibility for social engagement and revolt in contemporary society.

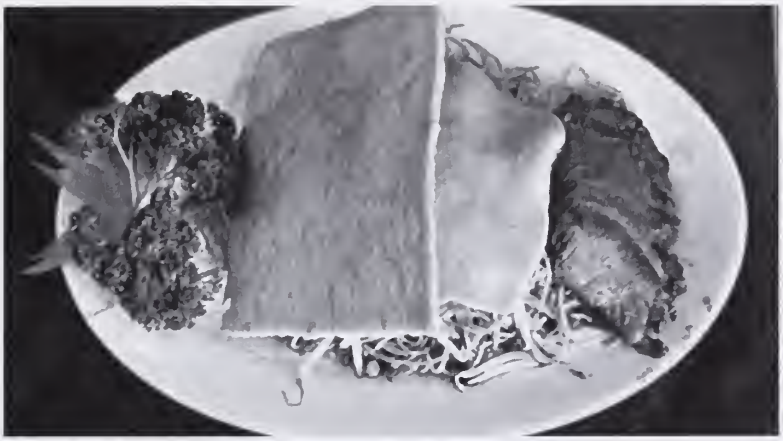
Johanna Billing, still from *Where She Is At*, 2001
Video, color, sound; 7:35 minutes, looped

Keren Cytter

Keren Cytter was born in Israel in 1977, moved to Amsterdam after finishing her studies in Tel Aviv, and is currently based in Berlin. Her prolific production spans across diverse media and genres: she writes novels and poetry, makes drawings, and recently founded a dance company. Primarily, however, she makes heavily text-based, narrative video works in a rough aesthetic that examine the social and physical effects of moving-image technology genres. Cytter explores the temporal and narrative conventions of such works and how these relate to the ways in which we perceive our lives and our relationship to the world.

New Age (2007), Cytter's first feature film, is set in the Netherlands; the whole cast speaks Dutch (English subtitles are provided). The film portrays several teenagers in various "everyday" situations: for example, two girls try to hitchhike to "the Big City," or a girl comes back to her hometown from a long absence, visiting her parents and her ex-boyfriend. Their interactions and conversations are as typical as can be, but slowly an uncanny, apocalyptic atmosphere builds up. A constantly looming threat gains more and more presence, and, in addition, all the characters make references to their military service, which seems to structure their lives to a large extent. It's only far into the film that the viewer realizes that the characters are living in the middle of a state of war; that, in fact, the film displaces Israeli conditions onto a Dutch setting.

Through this narrative displacement, *New Age* produces a spatial rupture that makes graspable what it means to be physically present amidst military conflicts, not simply to observe them through the remove of the mass media. It evokes the uncanniness that underlies those military conflicts in which most Western societies are deeply implicated and from which they profit, all the while assuring their citizens of their safe distance.



Keren Cytter, stills from *New Age*, 2007
Super16mm film, color, sound; 75 minutes

Kajsa Dahlberg

Interested in public space as a concept rather than a particular location, Swedish artist Kajsa Dahlberg often focuses on opening up spaces that are marked as personal or private to reveal their larger, collective possibilities. Her piece *A Room of One's Own/A Thousand Libraries* (2006) draws both form and content from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, first published in 1929, a seminal piece of feminist scholarship based on a series of lectures Woolf delivered at Cambridge University. Borrowing copies of *A Room of One's Own* from public libraries across Sweden, Dahlberg painstakingly transposed all the markings that had been made by individual readers—every note, doodle, and underlining—into a single book. For each underlined phrase, Dahlberg drew a line. Some sentences are so resonant, or marked upon so many times, that in Dahlberg's compilation, the Woolf text is overwritten and becomes almost illegible. In this way, Woolf's words are reframed within a collective script of responses, tied together not only across individuals, but also across a period of nearly half a century (Woolf's book first appeared in Swedish in 1958). Perhaps tellingly, one of the most underlined sentences is: "For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice."

Dahlberg's decision to bind the book of *A Room of One's Own/A Thousand Libraries*, printed in an edition of 1,000, in the style of a library book, but with a white cover that has no markings, title, or listed author, highlights her interest in thinking about specificity (as represented by the redrawn individual notes) through what is shared—illuminating the entry into a public sphere through the personal.

Kajsa Dahlberg, *A Room of One's Own/A Thousand Libraries*, 2006 (detail)
Artist's book, 5 7/8 x 8 5/16 in. (15 x 21.1 cm)

Maryam Jafri

Maryam Jafri's work examines how our understanding of the present is never neutral, but is always formed through an explanatory struggle to renegotiate past events and their symbolic value. In this regard, the American artist's work prompts a revaluation of the media as a site of ideological struggle and symbolic negotiation.

Jafri often highlights the different material and conceptual strategies through which history has been written and handed down to inform the base of "common sense," and through her works frequently unmasks the pervasive strategies of colonial control, which exerts persistent, if sometimes hard to detect, pressure in the cultural realm. Jafri works with materials from the archives of mass media: film, newspaper articles, and photographic sources, juxtaposing these official narratives across different historical moments and sites in order to expose and ultimately rewrite the meanings produced through politics and culture.

Siege of Karthoum, 1884 (2006), included in the exhibition, brings together archival newspaper reportage detailing past events with contemporary images from the 2003 U.S.-led war on Iraq. The articles are taken from the archives of the *New York Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* (UK), and the *Times* (UK). Spanning a period from the late nineteenth century to the present day, they depict the controlled way the colonial wars of conquest were presented to the public at home; by juxtaposing this archival coverage with recent images, Jafri exposes the predetermined script of the 2003 Iraq war and its colonial imprint. This drawing of unexpected parallels between these historical and current events also reveals how popular understandings of current affairs are informed—and even formed—by the ideological imprints of the past. Jafri's spatiotemporal displacements present a history of continuous domination disguised by the dominant notion of progress, thus rendering that same notion dubious.

THE BAGHDAD OF THE FUTURE

TO THE PEOPLE OF BAGHDAD

In the name of my , and in the name of the peoples over whom he rules, I address you as follows:
Our military operations have as their object the defeat of the enemy and the driving of him from these territories. In order to complete this task, I am charged with absolute and supreme control of all regions on which troops operate, but our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators. Since the days of Halaka your city and your lands have been subject to tyranny of strangers, your palaces have fallen into ruins, your gardens have sunk into desolation, and your forefathers and yourselves have groaned in bondage. Your sons have been carried off to wars not of your seeking, your wealth has been stripped from you by unjust men and squandered in distant places. O people of Baghdad! Remember that for 26 generations you have suffered under strange tyrants who have ever endeavoured to set one Arab house against another in order that they might profit by your dissensions. This policy is abhorrent to
and her Allies, for there can be neither peace nor prosperity where there is enmity and misgovernment. Therefore, I am commanded to invite you, through your nobles and elders and representatives to participate in the management of your civil affairs in collaboration with the political representatives of who will accompany the Army, so that you may be united with your kinsmen in north, east, south, and west in realizing the aspirations of your race.

FREEDOM FOR THE ARABS

Maryam Jafri, *Freedom for the Arabs—The Baghdad of the Future, The Times (UK), 1917*, from *Siege of Karthoum, 1884*, 2006
Inkjet print from photographic collage, 25 3/8 x 35 1/8 in. (64.5 x 89.2 cm)

Tellervo Kalleinen & Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen

Beginning in 2003, Finnish artists Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen have each developed their individual projects alongside a collaborative practice, working together within different social contexts to invite local communities into the artists' own production process in projects such as *I Love My Job* (2007–08) and *The Making of Utopia* (2006), which use Kalleinen and Kochta-Kalleinen's position as international artists to facilitate discussion about shared concerns and to mobilize "a public."

Complaints Choir was first launched in Birmingham, United Kingdom, in 2005. Kalleinen and Kochta-Kalleinen distributed fliers around the town asking residents to seize an unusual opportunity: to sing collectively their worries into the public sphere. Locals wrote down and compiled their complaints—big and small, personal and political. Everyday grievances were structured into lyrics and, through collaboration with a local musician, an abundance of corralled negative energy was channeled into immensely entertaining, and revealing, song. The problems of everyday life are often considered to be "just the way things are," dismissed as trivial or too personal, and quietly brushed aside. By relating the experiences of fellow citizens, the Complaints Choir facilitates a break in the conventional model of keeping grumbles quiet by transforming individual complaints into collective form, and activates a sense of collective stakes and responsibility (in other words, a sense of a public), with much levity and amusement. Since its first enactment, a great number of Complaints Choirs have been organized across the world, from Seoul to St. Petersburg. Each city has its own style of song and brand of complaints that lend valuable insights about the town, its people, their sense of humor and way of life, yet the viewer is often compelled to sing or hum along to the catchy melodies, thereby disrupting separations by connecting with the grievances of individuals from around the world, across gender, nationality, and other borders.

Tellervo Kalleinen & Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen,
still from *Complaints Choir (Birmingham)*, 2005
Video, color, sound; 8:54 minutes

Jennifer Phang

California-based writer and director Jennifer Phang works in short and feature-length film to create alternative worlds that combine reality, memory, and fantasy, and explore the relationship between history and place. Through an experimental and personal style, Phang collaborates with visual artists on cinematic and animation techniques that jump-cut through different points of view to form a fractured narrative that reimagines the laws of science and society.

Set in what at first seems to be present-day suburbia, *Half-Life* (2008) is the story of a family whose members become increasingly stifled by a spiral of heartbreak that began with their abandonment by their father. This sense of despair is heightened by relentless news reports of world violence and environmental disasters that slowly allow the viewer to realize that the film is set in a future eerily close to our own time. The young protagonist, Timothy, realizes that those around him have overlooked their own abilities to change their environments, thus preserving the status quo. Through sheer will and the historical import of an alternate world, Timothy bends the rules of linear time and static space. He moves back and forth across California's Diablo Valley landscape, flits between the past and future, and pulses in and out of "real life" and the animated scenes of his imaginary, alternate world (the lines that distinguish each are entirely blurred by the end of the film). In *Half-Life*, this alternate dimension exceeds the limits of the precise historical dimension of his personal time (he is but nine years old), allowing Timothy, his mother, and sister to come together collectively and change the hopeless conditions of their lives.

Jennifer Phang, still from *Half-Life*, 2008
35mm film, 16mm film, and digital animation (made from graphite drawings on paper) transferred to high-definition video, color, sound; 116 minutes

Kateřina Šedá

Czech artist Kateřina Šedá's practice is structured around social interventions staged in her hometown and others nearby. Driven by a sociological interest in common behavior, her work reactivates a sense of collective consciousness in the communities with which she engages. The functional principle of her projects is organizing events and games to enact fundamental transformations of social rules and patterns.

There is Nothing There (2003) consists of paper documents and a video that reference a social action realized in a village near the one in which she herself grew up. Taking as a starting point the complaints of the inhabitants about the lack of social services and places to gather in the village, the artist aims to provide situations, however humble, for a renewed sense of collective empowerment: breaking the dreary normalcy of the village as well as the sense of disillusion with the humdrum of everyday life. The artist convinced all the inhabitants of the town to submit themselves to a structured set of activities and rules for an entire day. Residents spent the day performing their normal activities—but synchronically. Together, they opened their windows in the morning, swept their walks at noon, had a beer at five, and turned out their lights all at once at night.

Another of Šedá's works, *Windows Exhibition* (2001), is a photographic series documenting another social action, this one in the artist's own village. Šedá asked residents to exhibit a selection of their personal objects in the windows of their homes, thus transforming the whole town into a living gallery. Both projects marked turning points for the two towns. According to Šedá, a renewed sense of community was awakened among the inhabitants, disrupting social conventions and rituals through a unified constellation of voices.

Kateřina Šedá, still from *There is Nothing There*, 2003
Video, color, sound; 30:12 minutes; and paper documents in a vitrine,
72 x 36 x 5 in. (182.9 x 91.4 x 12.7 cm)

Kevin Willmott

Born and raised near a U.S. Army base in Kansas, Kevin Willmott brings his experience as a peace and civil rights activist—fighting for the rights of the poor and the integration of segregated Catholic homeless shelters—to his work in film and theater. His work as a screenwriter, actor, and director consistently pairs different histories, across time and place, to reveal ideological connections across cultures, races, and nationalities. In this way, Willmott reveals the personal and political cost of history in contemporary everyday life.

Willmott fundamentally throws a teleological conception of history into question in his faux documentary *C.S.A: The Confederate States of America* (2004). Through both real and constructed archival photographs and documents, *C.S.A.* re-narrates American history as if the Southern states had won the Civil War. Mimicking the History Channel's mode of historical documentary, the film is paced in a drawn out, repetitive, and even tiresome manner to bring attention to the indulgent and celebratory tone of such historical narrations that are organized around a notion of the inevitable progress of a glorious nation. Interjected commercials reveal how the present day might appear given this revised history. While these commercials seem outlandish at first, in terms of the extreme notions of white superiority inherent in the brands and products marketed (the viewer affirms themselves by saying, "There is no way such things would exist because history did not really unfold in this way"), the end of Willmott's documentary reveals that these products either existed or actually exist today. *C.S.A.* examines the meaning of the nation's struggle toward racial equality (from the abolition of slavery to the civil rights movement) through an experiment of alternate history, and in the process reveals how ideologies concerning racial superiority are deeply embedded within American society.

Kevin Willmott, still from *C.S.A.: The Confederate States of America,* 2004
35mm film, 16mm film, and high-definition video, color and black-and-white, sound; 89 minutes

Key Words

Temporality

Our exhibition uses the term *temporality* to consider an event's relationship to a certain concept of history or of the unfolding of time. The exhibition is informed by Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in which he confronts two concepts of history: that of historicism and that of a messianic historical materialism. The former, which proffers a temporality of progress, is opposed by Benjamin. It implies a concept of time as homogenous and continuous, an empty time in whose steady (and endless) unfolding all events are recorded and contained. Benjamin embraces the latter, in which the task of the historical materialist is to retain the memory of the past as it flashes up at a moment of danger and to cite this image in the here and now.[1] Such citation of a past moment in the present creates a *rupture*, an event that disrupts the historicist's sense of any smooth unfolding of time and may mark the beginning of a new concept of time. (Such as that, in Marxist theory, of the bourgeois revolution.[2] It is significant that the French as well as the Russian revolutions established their own calendars, in order to mark an utterly new beginning and structuring of time.)

Another important strand in our understanding of temporality is the current discourse around the term *crisis*. This discourse coerces an acceptance of sovereign decisions and drastic measures, to sacrifice the present in order to prevent a projected dark future. Temporality, in other words, refers here to concepts of history as they are actualized and activated, as they play out in people's actions and relations with each other.

1. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968 [orig. 1940]).

2. Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977 [orig. 1867]).

Space

Though this exhibition ostensibly focuses on ideas of time, it inevitably takes up notions of space as well, since the two are nearly impossible to pull apart. How are events of the past inscribed in material space, and how does this, in effect, determine the lived relations in these spaces today?

Defining space has been a pointed debate for centuries: countering Isaac Newton's more totalizing assumption of "absolute space," Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz proposed that both time and space are not physical conditions in which we live, but rather modes through which we perceive and distinguish our surroundings.[1] In other words, for Leibniz, space and time are *relative* concepts: they are understood only through the positions of individuals and objects and their relative distance and directionality to one another. Henri Lefebvre also distinguishes between these categories of material space and the representation of space, and introduces a third category: "spaces of representation," or the way in which our conceptions of material space may change depending upon how the space is *lived*.[2] Demarcations of space conceived by humans, together with environmental factors and the natural landscape (and patterns of life within the landscape), influence our understanding of spatial areas. David Harvey, revisiting Lefebvre's theory of space, discusses multiple modes through which spatio-temporality has been categorized (as material, relative, or relational, for example), but posits that it may best be understood through dialectical relations between these designations.[3]

Indeed, in this exhibition, particular spaces are examined in terms of their physical geography as well as through their personal and collective histories. It is through recognition of the past and the present that the artists address the transformation of "spaces of representation."

1. H. G. Alexander, ed., *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1998).

2. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991 [orig. 1974]).

3. David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (New York and London: Verso, 2006).

Ideology

Ideology is a central concept within Marxist philosophy, and within orthodox Marxism, as well as within the Frankfurt School, ideology is understood as a "false consciousness" that can be unmasked through critical, reflective practices.[1] In contradistinction, Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci use the term ideology to refer to any general conception of the world that one can never be outside of as such. To this end, Althusser argues that ideology is learned and enforced through concrete practices within society that are perpetuated through state institutions he calls the Ideological State Apparatuses.[2] These institutions include schools, museums, prisons, hospitals, and family, among others. Gramsci argues that ideology is the way reality is understood for a particular social group, expressed in individual and collective manifestations of art, culture, language, and other forms of everyday life.[3] Ideology allows for a collective subjectivity that effectively works as the foundational cement of state and civil society in a particular historical moment. Gramsci points out that such "common sense" is based on a shared and assumed way of thinking and living that may not translate across different social groups, cultures, or nations.

A third position is that which is theorized by Stuart Hall and the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies. This position, which is informed by structuralist and post-structuralist theory, sees ideology as structures of signification and forms of social intellegibility that are bound up with social interests and power relations. From this perspective, the field of culture is constituted by a struggle over social meaning and the politics of representation.[4]

Various concepts of time and space are embedded in ideologies, and are thus interconnected with concepts of history and how we construct our world, playing out in everyday relations. In this exhibition, artists explore how the act of revealing ideology is one way in which ruptures within standard narratives of progress may be created.

1. Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998 [orig. 1845]).

2. Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008 [orig. 1971]).

3. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. I–III, ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992 [orig. 1948–51]).

4. Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1997).

Evocation

From the Latin *evocare*, which literally means "to call out," evocation is an act of recall and activation of past moments into the present. Evocation, which may involve the calling forth of past emotions, desires, and frustrations into the present moment, is distinct from invocation, in which historical facts are referenced as such. What characterizes our use of evocation here is the aim to reactivate a past demand in order to make it alive and functional within present time, and we identify evocation as an active organizing structure for a number of artists working today. Evoking, as we approach it in this exhibition, generates an enriched sense of the everyday, informing the current moment with a vivid consciousness of the past and its meanings. Actions and thoughts of the past and present are identified with each other through evocation, brought into reactive proximity where both may be transformed, and opening up the possibility of change both on a personal and a wider sociopolitical scale.

Crisis

In the midst of the current collapse of the financial markets, it seems extremely timely to speak of crisis, and in fact, the currency of the term in dominant discourse was one of the points of departure for our thinking about *temporality* and *rupture*. Yet the very sense of exception or emergency implied by the word is itself a result of what is actually an ongoing—and longstanding—discourse around crisis.

The term crisis has two traditions that we find especially relevant in the context of this exhibition: the Greek word *krisis* (meaning "decision") was used as a medical term, to refer to the critical moment during an illness (leading to either death or convalescence), while nineteenth-century economists took up the term to rationalize the functioning of market forces.

The function of crisis as a discursive figure is twofold: 1. It posits a dark future and then calls for sacrifice to prevent this impending threat. Under the "state of emergency" espoused in the name of crisis, the present is suspended as a site in which to make certain claims, such as for justice, and displaced by consuming anxiety about the future. 2. The figure of crisis thus participates in a discourse of threat that is itself a function of sovereignty. In popular culture, narratives of crisis are mostly centered around a protagonist who "does not blink" when it comes to making decisions. These narratives prepare the acceptance of measures even if they might seem drastic, such as the cutting of wages in order to prevent job losses. The dark future these measures would allegedly prevent, the audience is assured, would have been much worse.

Hesitation

To hesitate is to pause before speaking or taking action and often connotes unwillingness, indecision, or uncertainty. In this exhibition, we explore the ambiguity of hesitation: it delays decision or potentially changes the course of what is to come. Hesitation can be a strategy in which ruptures (or at very least, stutters) might be created in the current moment. Hesitation may be conceived as a paralyzing force: from the Latin verb *haesitare*—"to stick"—the verb might mean to be literally stuck in a rut, to be unable to mobilize out of an ongoing and potentially worsening state. But in our exhibition, we consider the empowering potential of hesitation. If the course of events is one of ongoing, escalating destruction, this stickiness can also provide the opportunity to create a bubble of possibility, a space and time for mobilization. In this sense, hesitation can mean resisting the urge to move forward in a prescribed direction (or to move forward at all). Thought of this way, hesitation suspends automatism and complicates postulated cause-and-effect relationships. When hesitation is produced by contradictory impulses and opposed forces, hesitation itself functions to generate an obstacle; however, the resulting pause in time might be seen as carving a space for the now, where an alternate course of events can be set into motion.

Rupture

Our approach to the concept of rupture is quite literal—a fundamental break or tear after which nothing is the same. The concept of rupture thus opposes one of progress and steady advancement; indeed, a rupture may serve to break open the ongoing and embedded conditions of domination. Ruptures do not just happen, nor should they be assumed to be such an overwhelming or abstract concept that they need to be seen as disempowering. Rather, ruptures can happen on the level of the everyday. In order to create a rupture and bring about radical change, the constant suspension of the present in the name of the future must be broken, and the present transformed into a space of action: into "the now." Ruptures break ideologically fixed notions of historical time, demarcated space, and personal relations, and can happen in each moment—on both the personal level of everyday practice, as well as on broader social, economic, and political terms. In this exhibition, we have identified evocation as an overarching strategy for creating ruptures on these various levels: through nonlinear understandings of temporality, recognizing the power of collectivity, and revealing the import of various spaces across time.

Essays

Luigi Fassi

Rewriting as Spirit of Cleavage: Common Sense and Social Transformability

In February of 1933, while imprisoned in the Italian town of Turi, political philosopher Antonio Gramsci wrote:

> *What is man?* This is the first and main question of philosophy. [. . .] If we think about that, we see that by raising the question of what man is, we want to say: what the man can become, meaning whether man can master his destiny, can "make himself," can create his own life. We therefore say that man is a process and precisely the process of his own acts. [. . .] And we want to know that "today," in the conditions given today, of present-day life and not of any life and any man.[1]

The philosophical density of the question posed by Gramsci in this passage immediately reveals the trajectory of his thought. His aim is not to outline an abstraction of human individuality, thus delivering the principles of an idealist anthropology detached from the real ground of history, but is, rather, to interrogate human experience and the continuous metamorphosis of historical and social relations. For Gramsci, *milieu* is the whole of social and political relations in which man is embedded, a shifting and malleable ground built by human interactions, never established once and for all, but constantly evolving with historical transformations. The individual identity of any single subject is, therefore, to be understood as a synthesis of the changes to the environment surrounding him, in a dialectical operation:

> It can be said that everyone changes himself, modifies, according to the way in which all the complex of relations in which he's embedded changes and modifies. In this sense, the real philosopher is and can't be anyone else than the politician, i.e., the active man who modifies the environment, meaning with environment

1. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, edizione critica dell'Istituto Gramsci, a cura di Valentino Gerratana (Torino: Einaudi, 2007), 1343–44: "*Che cosa è l'uomo? È questa la domanda prima e principale della filosofia. [. . .] Se ci pensiamo, vediamo che ponendoci la domanda che cosa è l'uomo vogliamo dire: che cosa l'uomo può diventare, se cioè l'uomo può dominare il proprio destino, può "farsi", può crearsi una vita. Diciamo dunque che l'uomo è un processo e precisamente è il processo dei suoi atti. [. . .] E ciò vogliamo saperlo "oggi", nelle condizioni date oggi, della vita "odierna" e non di una qualsiasi vita e un qualsiasi uomo.*" When possible I will be using the English translation of Gramsci's work provided in Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol.I–III, ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992 [orig. 1948–51]). However, since this English edition is still ongoing and therefore covers at the current moment only the first eight notebooks, any quote taken from notebooks nine onwards will be proposed in a translation done by the author and will refer to the Italian edition, as cited here.

> the whole of the relations to which every individual takes part. [. . .] Making a personality means acquiring consciousness of these relations; modifying your own personality means modifying the whole of these relations. But these relations are not easy. [. . .] Besides, having a better or a worse knowledge of them already modifies them. Knowledge is power, in this regard.[2]

Gramscian anthropology is marked by a profound awareness of human, social, and political relations as historically variable facts, determined by the dynamics of conflict and struggle. The idea of social transformability, a key principle to Gramsci's thought, is manifested in his urgent need to draw attention to the ways in which ideologies, culture, and thought are transmitted through a variety of traditional practices and rituals, and how this serves to crystallize in people a "common sense" of historical time.

For this reason, Gramsci is an important point of reference for contemporary considerations of the potential for cultural forms to act as means of subversion, to offer ideological contrast and create counter-hegemonic meanings. Gramsci's anti-deterministic and anti-economical interpretation, in opposition to historical Marxism, is an adventure toward the discovery of the transformative and revolutionary potential of cultural experiences and human relations.

Ideology, Popular Culture, and Common Sense

Updating a tradition of political analysis initiated at the beginning of European modernity by Niccolò Machiavelli with his extensive treatise on the preservation of social control in the realm of political direction, *Il Principe*, Gramscian research affirms that the structures as well as the exercise of power are a complex interaction of several factors, divided into two main categories—*political society* and *civil society*—respectively defined by direct force and diffused consent.[3]

2. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, 1345: "*Si può dire che ognuno cambia sé stesso, si modifica, nella misura in cui cambia e modifica tutto il complesso di rapporti di cui egli è il centro di annodamento. In questo senso il filosofo reale è e non può essere altri che il politico, cioè l'uomo attivo che modifica l'ambiente, inteso per ambiente l'insieme dei rapporti di cui ogni singolo entra a far parte. [. . .] Farsi una personalità significa acquistare coscienza di tali rapporti, modificare la propria personalità significa modificare l'insieme di questi rapporti Ma questi rapporti non sono semplici. [. . .] Inoltre averne conoscenza più o meno profonda, già li modifica. [. . .] La conoscenza è potere, in questo senso.*"

3. Gramsci outlines the distinction between political society and civil society in several passages within the *Prison Notebooks*. See Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol II,

According to Gramscian terminology, political society is the site of the direct exertion of power, institutionalized with the practice of government through its legislation and its agents of direct coercion, the military and the police. This apparatus is accompanied in fluid contiguity by that of civil society, the site of consensus and persuasion, in which power articulates in soft and pervasive manners, exerting a widespread cultural hegemony aimed at generating spontaneous consensus and obedience to power. The Gramscian position breaks open the relation of direct reciprocity between economics and the formation of ideology that forms the basis of Marxist orthodoxy, highlighting the importance of the superstructural forms of culture, as well as the ideological relevance of apparently minor phenomena and social contents in that formation as well. The increasing attention Gramsci draws to the various manifestations of popular culture and their complex resonances, detached from any rigid determination in historical-material sense, is his fundamental legacy to the cultural studies discipline, founded in England in the 1960s, a survey of whose key originating texts reveals the discipline's adoption of the Gramscian concept of the political and transformative role of culture.[4] In fact, Gramsci dismantled every conviction about the

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5th notebook, §127, 382; vol. III, 6th notebook, §10, 9–10; §24, 20–21; §65, 48–49; §81, 64–65.

4. See Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Edison, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998 [orig. 1957]); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983 [orig. 1958]); Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001 [orig. 1961]); Eduard Palmer Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1991 [orig. 1963]); Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1997). A brief and introductive analysis about the role played by Gramscian thought in the foundation of British cultural studies is outlined by John Storey in *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture: Theories and Methods*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 3–4: "The introduction of Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' into British cultural studies [. . .] brought about a rethinking of popular culture. It did this in two ways. First of all it produced a rethinking of the politics of popular culture; popular culture was now seen as a key site for the production and reproduction of hegemony. [. . .] Cultural studies argues that popular culture is one of the principal sites where these divisions are established and contested: that is, popular culture is an arena of struggle and negotiation between the interests of dominant groups and the interests of subordinate groups. [. . .] The introduction of hegemony into British cultural studies also produced a rethinking of the concept of popular culture itself. [. . .] From the perspective of the cultural studies appropriation of hegemony, however, popular culture is neither an 'authentic' folk, working class or subculture, nor a culture simply imposed by the capitalist culture industries but [. . .] a contradictory mix of forces from both 'below' and 'above'. . . ."

neutrality of forms and cultural events expressed through lifestyle choices and social traditions, revealing how cultural phenomenons must be understood as ideological "fortresses and emplacements"[5] that support precise hegemonic projects. Culture and its manifestations are therefore to be deciphered as sites of latent conflict between dominant and subaltern social groups, which operate in ideological opposition to each other as they struggle to obtain cultural hegemony in society. All manifestations of culture—from newspapers and libraries to architecture, the layout of streets and their names[6]—show evidence of this live ideological negotiation in which specific ways of seeing the world strive for dominance.

The task of philosophy then, as Gramsci sees it, is to conceive of itself as a "cultural struggle"[7] aimed at revolutionary resistance and social transformation, or, in other words, as "pro-active social relationships of cultural transformation"[8] enacted to counter the dominant hegemony with renewed social and political vision. This accounts for Gramsci's belief that philosophy be concretely engaged in everyday experience, so as to "modify the world and overturn praxis."[9]

For Gramsci, the role of philosophy as a critical exercise is therefore to stress popular opinion and common sense as sites of conflict in the struggle to counter the dominant vision of the world and reestablish a new "ideological panorama."[10] He uses the term "common sense"[11] to define the dominant conception of the world in a

5. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. III, 7th notebook, §16, 169. Gramsci adopts a number of military terms to describe the way hegemony and ideology operate, stressing therefore the acute sense of strife that he perceives in the context of cultural and ideological struggle.

6. Ibid., vol. II, 3rd notebook, §49, 53.

7. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. II, 10th notebook, §44, 1330: "*Lotta culturale.*"

8. Ibid., 1332: "*Rapporto sociale attivo di modificazione culturale.*"

9. Ibid., §28, 1266: "*Modificare il mondo e rovesciare la prassi.*"

10. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, 11th notebook, §12, 1392: "*Panorama ideologico.*" In ibid., 1378, Gramsci also writes: "*La filosofia è la critica e il superamento della religione e del senso comune.*" "Philosophy is the critique and overcoming of religion and common sense."

11. Ibid., §13, 1396: "*La filosofia del senso comune, che è la "filosofia dei non filosofi", è la concezione del mondo assorbita acriticamente dai vari ambienti sociali e culturali in cui si sviluppa l'individualità morale dell'uomo medio. Il senso comune non è una concezione unica, identica nel tempo e nello spazio: è il "folclore" della filosofia e come il folclore si presenta in forme innumerevoli: il suo tratto fondamentale e più caratteristico è di essere una concezione (anche nei singoli cervelli) disgregata, incoerente, inconseguente, conforme alla posizione sociale e culturale delle moltitudini di cui esso è la filosofia.*" "Philosophy of common sense, which is the 'philosophy of the not philosophers,' is the conception

particular historical moment, uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which moral individuality develops. Public opinion and common sense in Gramsci's argument inform popular belief, a fragmented entity constituted by a variety of cultural sources different from each other yet intertwined in an historically determined context. This implies the necessity to critically analyze all of the symbolic and cultural manifestations in which a conception of the world is crystallized in order to determine how the dominant power relation shapes the narrative connecting past, present, and future in the realm of culture and common sense in order to maintain its dominance.

Artistic Practices: Tactics and Counter Narratives

One of the primary focuses of *Time Out of Joint* is to show how the artists included share a desire to investigate the ideological use of temporality by unmasking its role in the construction of common sense. The manipulation of the relationship between present and past, particularly with regard to popular opinion, is the concern of several works in the show. These works aim to bring about a different writing of the present, able to generate a transformation of common sense through a repositioning of sedimented cultural forms and social rituals, challenging dominant conceptions and suggesting a move toward new paradigms.

Composed through a juxtaposition of archival coverage with current images, the collages constituting *Siege of Karthoum, 1884* (2006) by Maryam Jafri enact a philologically precise deconstruction of common sense as formed through public opinion by showing that the latter is an artificially given construct, one manipulated through the delivery of mass-media news. The artist utilizes events from the past in order to construct ready-made commentary for the current war in Iraq, showing how the logic of colonial and imperial language from the nineteenth to the twentieth century remains

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of the world uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man develops. Common sense is not a unitarian conception, identical in space and time: it is the 'folklore' of philosophy and, as a folklore, manifests itself in countless forms. Its main and most characteristic feature is to be (even in the single minds) a disaggregated, incoherent, inconsequent conception, coherent to the social and cultural position of the multitudes of which itself is philosophy."

practically unchanged, a sort of ideological matrix or predetermined script suitable for the transmission of information and the control of public opinion. The work demonstrates how ideological control implemented through British and American reporting on the Iraq war is linguistically similar to that of the colonial wars fought by the British in the Middle East at the turn of the last century. The artist thus reveals the ideological manipulation of the present for the purpose of creating a cohesive and homogeneous "common sense."

Jafri's strategy repurposes the past as commentary on the present, making the two moments react to one another in order to unmask the ideological apparatuses that control the present, and potentially deactivating their efficacy and validity. The artist suggests an interpretation of temporality as the site of an epistemological break, a rupture, disarticulating a predetermined and static reading of the present and to be understood as activating a "spirit of cleavage" in the Gramscian sense.[12] The progressive awareness of one's own individual and historical responsibility, of the necessity of a continuous critical rethinking of the present in light of interpretations of the past that is imposed by the dominant tradition, is essential to this perspective.

The spirit of resistance interpreted as a tool of counter-ideological struggle is also present in the work *Rebels of the Dance* (2002) by Fikret Atay. Two Kurdish teenagers temporarily appropriate the ATM vestibule of a village in Turkey on the Iraqi border and transform the anonymous location into the site of an improvised singing performance using a reinvented litany of songs taken from the Kurdish traditional repertoire. Through this symbolic gesture of transgression, in defiance of the Turkish government's ongoing suppression of expressions of Kurdish culture, the two protagonists attempt to reinvent and carry on the logic of cultural resistance enacted by the Kurdish people. Exploring and reinventing the role of identity under rigid political oppression, the small scale of their private, spontaneous action bridges past and present, connecting its relevance to the larger collective frame of the Kurdish population. The institutional nature of the ATM is temporarily interrupted, and its identity in practical and symbolic terms is subverted by way of music and song that suggest guerrilla resistance and struggle against conformity.

The actions of the two teenagers can be described as that of the "tactic," as defined by the French philosopher Michel de Certeau: a

12. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. II, §49, 53.

tool employed from a position of inferiority to introduce the actor into the territory of others by means of stratagems and improvisations that render his interventions strong and unpredictable.[13] In Atay's video, fixed functionalities and meanings are hollowed out by means of an "antidiscipline,"[14] a personal and temporary rewriting of the place put into question and a total reconfiguration of its rules, uses, and functions. Thus, the teenagers perform a reinvention of the everyday, turning their litany into an act of political resistance. By appropriating the ATM booth, which embodies the image of a global and unified flow of capital and culture, they enact a symbolic resistance.[15] It becomes a gesture of cleavage, altering the predetermined relationship between past and present, in what would seem to be a simple outpouring of pleasure. The singing of the two protagonists articulates the revolutionary potential of the marginalized Kurdish identity, officially banned and discredited in the past, now freely reinvented by them in the present. As in Jafri's work, what is enacted in Atay's is a principle of rewriting, an epistemological gesture reappropriating the present by means of a dynamic creative and innovative force. In the works of both Jafri and Atay, "tactic" is determined by a "war of position,"[16] the term Gramsci gives to those strategies organized and performed on the cultural level to oppose the dominant hegemonic formation. He regards such tactics, typically performed from a position of inferiority or subjugation, as fundamental in the symbolic and political construction of an alternative and renewed "common sense."

According to Gramsci, cultural forms are always held in precarious balance, subjugated to continuous renegotiation as played out in the various conflicts between social groups at a given historical moment. It is this ongoing course of renegotiation that brings to the foreground the relevance of *every single* voice and gesture as

13. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), xix. The work of de Certeau has exerted a seminal influence in the realm of "consumption theory" within the theoretical frame of popular culture studies. See the works by John Fiske focusing on consumption as a site of agency and subversion, *Understanding Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989) and *Reading the Popular* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

14. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday*, xv.

15. Ibid., xvii: "The tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices."

16. The expression *guerra di posizione* (war of position) is used by Gramsci in opposition to *guerra di movimento* (war of movement) in several passages within the *Prison Notebooks*. See, for instance, Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. III, 6th notebook, §155, 17.

a possibility to bring about change within the social realm. In fact, opinions, ideas, and traditions, as well as the individual subjectivities informed by them, are not static entities but cultural processes, exposed to mutations and evolutions. Gramscian theory is thus fascinating because it is a sophisticated and effective tool to assess the political relevance of every subtle modification within the social fabric. By empowering the sense of individual responsibility, it allows the individual to counter predetermined rituals and common opinions, opposing the strength of ingrained everyday practices.

The attempt to untangle common sense is at the core of Kateřina Šedá's work. Her practice operates in the realm of consolidated social rituals and gestures, by opening a renewed, uncertain, and reinvented present. In *There is Nothing There* (2003), the artist addresses the will to overcome severe social isolation in performative terms within the rigid individualism that characterizes the life of inhabitants in a small village of the Czech Republic, near the one where the artist herself grew up. Raised in the tradition of a common sense marked by cynicism and disillusion, the residents of Ponětovice have increasingly limited, over the years, their opportunities for mutual communication. Taking as a starting point the sense of resignation perceived by the inhabitants to this situation, Šedá organized and structured for them a social game in the form of a regime of common and synchronized actions, such as opening their windows, sweeping out front, and shopping, to take place over the course of a single day, from early morning to night. The artist's whole project is centered around the possibility of reactivating a new present, charged with regenerative strength and driven by the dormant complex of frustrations and desires of the villagers. It is a process that aims to change common sense by what Gramsci calls "overturning praxis," switching from a critical theoretical approach to a practical-transformative one. The successful realization of the social game (everyone in the village participated in it) gave the inhabitants the possibility to confront mundane everyday activities from a new perspective: an unexpected emotional panorama with a reconsidered sense of community and reappropriation of the present. In this way, even by means of humble and temporary gestures, Šedá succeeded in providing the inhabitants with a renewed awareness, opening the possibility for a better future in the social life of the village. The artist's intervention shows the extent to which human subjectivity is necessarily constituted in the ground of an ideological form determined by specific social

relations, destined to stagnate if not constantly questioned and problemized. The artist, in fact, intervenes on the ideological terrain of subjectivity by working on the frustrated and forgotten desires of the villagers, encouraging them to have more open interactions. As is the case with Jafri and Atay, Šedá's artistic practice is a re-enactment of the present, where rupture with the fixed yet lifeless rituals of the past is generated by the inhabitants themselves, for whom the social game represents the possibility to exploit their own dormant emotional potentialities.

Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen also use desire as an unexpected weapon against static traditions of common sense. Articulated in a variety of international sites after its first realization in Birmingham in 2005, their *Complaints Choir* (ongoing) is structured in the form a workshop that the artists hold with a selection of the local residents. In each Complaints Choir, the artists encourage participants to actively express all of their complaints and passions—those both produced and repressed by their social context. Whatever the city or milieu, the complaints gathered tend to focus on social issues, such as the lack of care and communication among people, thus signalling frustration with a general sense of indifference and disregard toward the collective and the community. The resulting texts, then composed as songs, thematize critique and disobedience in response to common sense. Everyday reality, routine, and conventionally accepted social norms are attacked and deconstructed by the logic of the Complaints Choir by way of irony. The performances always take place in public spaces, where the singing force of the complaints concerning that specific location finds an immediate audience, opening the project to an even more diverse array of culturally and anthropologically determined reactions. The will to renew the individual and collective capacity transforms the present into a time of innovation, where the protagonist is the subversive strength expressed by the voices, the complaints, and ultimately the desires of the singers. The sense of a passively and uncritically accepted common sense, handed down and imposed by tradition, breaks open in the constellation of the single voices of the choir. Each of them becomes, here too, a principle of rewriting, moving from the recent past to the everyday life of the present, granting the latter the possibility to detach from any predetermined ideological impositions, to join thus an unexpected space of innovation and freedom.

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Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, PARC - Direzione Generale per la qualità e la tutela del paesaggio, l'architettura e l'arte contemporanee

GAI - Associazione per il Circuito dei Giovani Artisti Italiani

Lucy Gallun

Interstitial Potential: A Conception of Spatio-Temporalities[1]

Yto Barrada, *Ceuta Border*, 1999,
from *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project*, 1999–2003
Chromogenic print, 31 3/16 x 31 3/16 in. (80 x 80 cm)

As others scramble up the parched earth behind him, a boy pauses to smoke. He lingers, lifting his cigarette to his lips, emphasizing the moment and his present state. This boy, captured in a photograph by the Moroccan artist Yto Barrada, is actually one of many who have gathered at the borders of the Spanish enclave of Ceuta on mainland Africa.[2] They mass into groups and attempt to cross into enclaves such as Ceuta or Melilla, storming the barriers at once. Some are able to get through, while many others are sent back to various destinations by bus. In a series of strikingly rich photographs, *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project* (1999–2003), Barrada presents images such as this one, imbued with the particular mindsets, sensibilities, and outlooks of their subjects who are living at the Strait of Gibraltar. Barrada's project is about this place and its particular situation(s).

1. See Key Words, "Space" and "Temporality," p. 28–29.
2. Yto Barrada is not included in the exhibition.

At its narrowest width, the shores of the Strait of Gibraltar are eight miles apart. On one side of the waterway sits the country of Spain, part of the larger geographical area known as the European continent, and also a member of what might be deemed its political guise, the European Union. Across the chasm lies Morocco, "the gateway of Africa," at least in terms of this particular point of entry or, as may be more apt, exit.

In the city of Tangier, Morocco, for example, the lives of the city's inhabitants are shaped by the omnipresent force of the strait: they exist *at* the strait and *with the presence of* the strait. The strait is, for Tangier, at once a physical and a political border. For Barrada, the thought of migration across that strait hangs heavy in the air, in the unrealized dreams of people walking the streets, and from the absence of those who have gone. How might artists address such a conception of space as it is informed by time, informed by memory? To look at one troubling example, how might artists address the current space of the migrant, after his journey has been initialized? Even as he holds no political rights and subsists on inadequate provisions, how might his spatial existence be rearticulated in terms of hope? How might he realize the potential of his inhabited space *in the current moment*?

"People differ in their awareness of space in time in the way they elaborate a spatiotemporal world," notes the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, in his discussion of "time in experiential space."[3] He goes on to ask: "If people lack a sense of clearly articulated space, will they have a sense of clearly articulated time?" In some cases, the natural environment plays a role. Tuan introduces two social examples: the Congo Pygmies, "enveloped in the dense forest," do not observe the spatial distinctions of land and sky that are so familiar to many of us. On the other hand, the Hopi, a native tribe in the American Southwest, live on dry plateaus, in an environment "of panoramic views and sharply etched landmarks in antithesis to the womblike, sheltered milieu of the rain forest dwellers." How, then, is one group's time-space conceived differently than another's? If certain environmental factors may cause time to take on a degree of shallowness, how might other natural elements manifest either a sense of futurity or a deep conception of memory and history?

3. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 119.

As Henri Lefebvre reminds us, "the departure point for [the] history of space is not to be found in geographical descriptions of natural space, but rather in the study of natural rhythms, and of the modification of those rhythms and their inscription in space by means of human actions, especially work-related actions. It begins, then, with the spatiotemporal rhythms of nature as transformed by a social practice."[4] While environmental factors of physical space, and, in turn, the patterns or rhythms of life within them, are influential determinants in an individual's conceptions of space through time, they necessarily exist in a dialectical relationship with manmade demarcations on and of space. Together, these natural and manufactured determinants form the ground on which subjectivity is enacted: as we change the environment around us, we are also changing ourselves. As Lefebvre further emphasizes, that ground is not uniform: "natural space *changes*: one might say that practical activity writes upon nature, albeit in a scrawling hand, and that this writing implies a particular representation of space. Places are marked, noted, named. Between them, within the 'holes in the net,' are *blank or marginal spaces*."[5] How, then, might space be realized in its potential for possible change? Can forms of space—material, "real" space—be articulated in metaphoric terms of possibility? Might Lefebvre's blank or marginal spaces also be conceived in this way? When history and changes in natural space are taken into account *over time*, is some semblance of rupture possible within that space?

A native of the city of Tangier understands the Strait of Gibraltar in part through its physicality. Standing at its shores, she can feel the water lapping at her toes. The wind sweeps across the waves and swirls around her before its gusts continue up into the city streets. In this way, she knows the material of this space: it is *experienced* space; in Lefebvre's terms, this is *absolute* space. Of course, she is also aware that across the strait, in Spain, someone else may be looking out across the water. Thus, she conceives of the space in *relative* terms as well; relative to her own position. However, there is also a *relational* component in her conception of this space. David Harvey explains that "the relational view of space holds there is no such thing

4. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991 [orig. 1974]), 117.

5. Ibid., 117–18 (emphases mine).

as space or time outside of the processes that define them. [. . .] Processes do not occur *in* space but define their own spatial frame. [. . .]"[6] In other words, the space of the Strait of Gibraltar is conceived by the Tangier native through her own *lived* experience of the space: the space, for her, is formed in this way through her own travels across the strait, or through memories of those who have left Tangier for locations in Europe, on the other side of this body of water. This relational view, then, is vital to a comprehensive understanding of the world in which we live. As Harvey elaborates:

> What we do as well as what we understand is integrally dependent upon the primary socio-temporal frame within which we situate ourselves. [. . .] It is only in the [relational world] that we can start to grapple with many aspects of contemporary politics since that is the world of political subjectivity and political consciousness. [. . .] Plainly, we cannot understand the shifting terrain upon which political subjectivities are formed and political actions occur without thinking about what happens in relational terms.[7]

In his chapter "Space as a Key Word," Harvey proposes what he calls a "matrix": a three-row by three-column table in which three divisions of space-time—absolute, relative, relational—are compared with the three modes of spatial understanding as identified by Lefebvre—these being experienced, conceptualized, and lived space. Building on these terms, Harvey suggests that the points of intersection therein suggest "different modalities of understanding the meanings of space and space-time."[8] Harvey is interested in exploring the dialectical relations between such designations, and finds that the use of this system of comparison may lay out some complexities of these combinations. In fact, Harvey often finds that it is "impossible to confine oneself to just one mode of spatial and spatio-temporal thinking."[9]

In the video *Kings of the Hill* (2003), by Israeli artist Yael Bartana, the camera observes a gathering at an area of sandy crevices perched above the sea near Tel Aviv.[10] The gathering is comprised

6. David Harvey, "Space as a Key Word," in *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (New York and London: Verso, 2006), 273.

7. Ibid., 128–29.

8. Ibid., 133. The method of creating this matrix to think about these relationships is inherently flawed, of course, as it is itself a material and absolute conception.

9. Ibid., 136.

10. Another of Bartana's works, *Wild Seeds in America* (2008-09), is included in the exhibition.

Yael Bartana, still from *Kings of the Hill*, 2003
Video, color, sound; 7:30 minutes

of men operating trucks and SUVs, each attempting to maneuver their vehicles over and onto the steep rises of the land. While onlookers, including women who sit discreetly nearby, gather on the rocks, the men take turns spinning their wheels and ramming their trucks into the packed earth. The action is presented almost as an ethnographic survey, in which we note the machismo of the men and their competitive drive (or is it stubbornness?). As the hills grow dark and headlights are switched on, Bartana captures the passage of time: the men and their trucks have been gathering here all afternoon and into the evening, relentlessly trying to carve out their places in this landscape. The question of who these men are and why they are doing what they are doing remains ambiguous, and set within the context of a historically contested space, what appears to be a form of recreation becomes, in this video, a mode through with to explore themes rich in the ground of nationalism and identity formation. Bartana studies how space is delineated, but also how space is lived. The material space of these hills is quite tangible, but the space is understood not only through its absolute physicality, but also through its history, and the memories that it evokes for each of these men and their families. Indeed, in writing about the effort to understand particular sites, Harvey has noted that one "cannot box political and

collective memories in some absolute space"—rather, these must be approached with relative and especially relational terms in mind.[11]

As noted above, Lefebvre points out that, "places are marked, noted, named." However, between these places that have been *written*, "within the 'holes in the net,' are *blank or marginal spaces*."[12] Certainly, it seems to follow that spaces that have not been marked or written are inherently blank. Yet Lefebvre also posits that these spaces may be "marginal," a term which deserves closer examination. In spatial terms, marginal spaces imply those that are situated at borders or edges; one might call them "peripheral." The reference to peripheral space may conjure an image of emptiness: at the end of a long road, a vista, a vast shore, at which land stops and the sea begins. Or, perhaps more commonly, "the periphery" may be derided as an undesirable place, a place away from where the action is: out in the sticks. In this regard, it should be noted that the term "marginal" is often called upon to imply not only the outer limits, but also the lower limits—minimal, negligible, or almost insufficient.[13] These terms bring to mind the example of an individual living a "marginal" subsistence, scraping by. This connotation should not be taken as coincidental; to be "outside" of the understood limits is not encouraged.

In fact, the definition of a periphery is also multifold. In one sense, it is the external or outermost bounds of something—its margins, as opposed to its center or its internal core. On the other hand, a periphery may in fact be an area *past* the limits, outside the boundaries and lying further than the perceived edges. In this sense, the periphery is almost elusive, as it is inherently an expression of *the beyond*. The Egyptian artist Hala Elkoussy explores what she dubs *Peripheral Landscapes* (2003–05) in a series of photographs, delving into the

11. Harvey, "Space as a Key Word," 125.

12. Interestingly, in other texts, Lefebvre has also implied that there may be possibility present in blank or marginal spaces. See, for example, Henri Lefebvre, "Notes on the New Town (April 1960)" in *Introduction to Modernity: Twelve Preludes, September 1959–May 1961*, trans. John Moore (New York and London: Verso, 1995), 116–126; and Henri Lefebvre, *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Upheaval*, trans. Alfred Ehrenfeld (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969 [orig. 1968]).

13. There has been ample scholarship devoted to this topic. See, for example, Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, and Cornel West, eds., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture* (New York and Cambridge, MA: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and The MIT Press, 1990).

Hala Elkoussy, *Peripheral Landscape #4, Al Tagamo' Al Khamis,* 2004
Inkjet print on vinyl, dimensions variable

environs at the outskirts of the expansive city of Cairo, and identifying the multifaceted relationship between the center (the urban) and the outside (the rural).[14] Concrete structures rise in the midst of dry, open expanses: these elements point at once to the density of construction that might take place in the city, as well as the open landscape of the countryside. Each of these photographs depicts a space of contemplation, as opposed to the chaotic space of the city. Cairo is a dynamic metropolis, constantly in flux, due in part to migration from the rural areas. By emphasizing these fleeting moments, Elkoussy explores the question of "belonging" to the city. The boundaries of the urban, suburban, and rural here are constantly shifting, so even as these images appear to capture moments of stillness, we must realize that the sites may have since been swallowed up in continued urban growth, or conversely, abandoned and left to crumble.

Borders and their mutations and permeations are explored in detail by the interdisciplinary group Multiplicity, based in Milan.

14. Hala Elkoussy is not included in the exhibition.

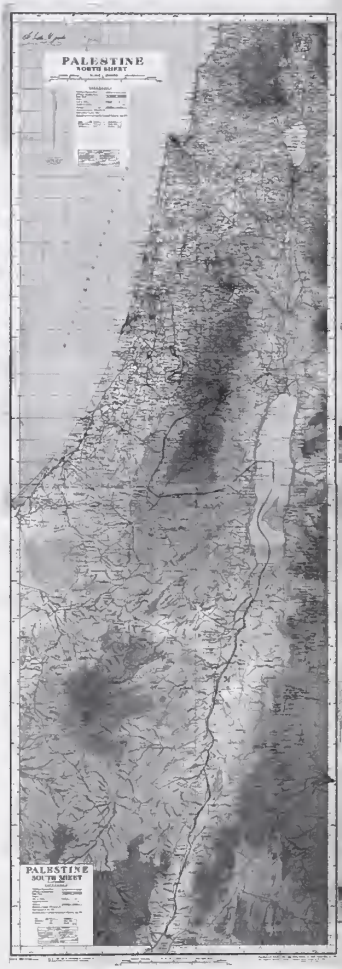
Spearheaded by the architect Stefano Boeri, Multiplicity is a network consisting of geographers, sociologists, artists, urban planners, and other individuals that realizes projects of territorial investigation. Multiplicity has engaged in a range of ventures, examining the modes of mobility across the Mediterranean Sea, the manifestations of global tourism, and the operations of boundaries in Israel-Palestine, among other projects. True to their name, the group recognizes the *multiplicity* of the terms in each of these circumstances, outlining a range of "border devices" as well as "the flow that runs through them [and the] identity of those who live within them."[15] A list of these border devices includes "enclosures," "pipes," "funnels," "folds," "sponges," and "phantom limbs." This last term, for example, refers to the conditions that are "generated when a physical border disappears. Often, the memory of a former situation metaphorically regenerates the border." In the instances of "folds," on the other hand, borders have not disappeared, but have rather doubled up and "taken on a sort of 'third' nature; they are in some way 'other' [. . .]. Folds are normally controlled either by a neutral third party or by no one."[16]

Some complexities of identifying devices such as "enclosures" and "folds" are examined, if not named as such, by the Mexico City–based Belgian artist Francis Alÿs in his video about the "Green Line" of Israel-Palestine, the armistice boundary that was drawn in green pencil on a map after the end of Israel's war of independence in 1948.[17] Alÿs's video in collaboration with Julian Devreaux, *SOMETIMES DOING SOMETHING POETIC CAN BECOME POLITICAL AND SOMETIMES DOING SOMETHING POLITICAL CAN BECOME POETIC (The Green Line)* (2005), "questions the physicality and cultural relevance of the Green Line, its function as a spiritual division of the city of Jerusalem, and its role in the Arab-Israeli conflict," according to the press release of the David Zwirner Gallery in New York, where the work was displayed. In the video, Alÿs carries a can of dripping green paint along the route of this line (which, because it was drawn in thick pencil on a map, is actually an area several meters wide). In this way, Alÿs's video chronicles an action that commented on the perhaps arbitrary boundary—how it was "invented" or written, and how its meaning stems from the way it was constructed. Indeed,

15. Stefano Boeri, "Border Syndrome: Notes for a Research Program," in *Territories* (Berlin and Cologne: KW Institute for Contemporary Art and Walter König, 2003), 57.

16. Ibid.

17. Francis Alÿs is not included in the exhibition.



Francis Alÿs, still and map from *SOMETIMES DOING SOMETHING POETIC CAN BECOME POLITICAL AND SOMETIMES DOING SOMETHING POLITICAL CAN BECOME POETIC (The Green Line)*, 2005
Photographic documentation of an action, Jerusalem. Video projection, two hard drives, touch screen, five MDF tables, ten lamps, framed map, works on paper, photo collages, one painting, and one wood gun sculpture. Video, color; 17:45 minutes

the borders of Israel and its adjacent territories have themselves been blurred and relatively dynamic over the more than half a century since this line was drawn, but the "fixity" of the boundary at a given moment certainly results in very real consequences.

In his seminal text "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin posits that unlike the figure of the historicist, "a historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history. [. . .] [The historical materialist] remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history."[18] In Yto Barrada's *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project*, one photograph portrays a woman, seen from behind, as she looks out of a ferry window. Barrada notes that she sits in the first-class lounge of a ferry on its way

Yto Barrada, *First Class Lounge*, 2002,
from *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project*, 1999–2003
Chromogenic print, 23 3/8 x 23 3/8 in. (60 x 60 cm)

18. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968 [orig. 1940]), 262.

from Morocco to Spain. Her position, with her back to the camera, forces us to imagine or presume her emotional state, but the specific context of this photograph hints at the subject's origin and destination, and prompts a variety of assumptions about her connection to these locations, especially in relation to the other subjects of Barrada's series. In such works, there is a distinct juxtaposition between this "destination" (or the country that one hopes to reach), and the *present* location. As Barrada has noted, "when you spend your time on the edge, on the jumping-off place of Africa, trying to get to the other side, you're as a consequence turning your back on whatever's happening where you are, so you're not invested in what you're doing for your own country."[19] The question then is, where is the power for change located—the future space or the present space? Barrada's examples, thought of in this way, then, focus on the spatial considerations of the present, and ask whether these are, on the one hand, examples of a present in transition, or, on the other hand, a present at which "time has come to a stop," as in Benjamin's conditions.

There are several terms that might be used in reference to these "in-between" spaces, but each has its own, sometimes problematic, connotations. Adjectives like "intermediate" or "midway," for example, inherently suggest an intermediary space existing between the origin and the destination, and thus always automatically imply the category of transition. Indeed, the temporal connotations of the terms are themselves various: some might reference a moment in time, while others imply an endless experience ("limbo").

One compelling discussion is that of the designation of "third space." In terms of the history of colonial relations, the cultural theorist Homi Bhabha has used the designation of the "third space" to emphasize that an oppressed culture is not rendered mute by the colonizing authority, but is instead mutually formed by the presence of both traditions. Bhabha's definition of the third space (a term borrowed from Frederic Jameson), is so named to distinguish it from the two traditionally acknowledged spaces—in which one space traditionally dominates the other—and to destabilize such binaries. As Bhabha writes, "The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space—a third space—where

19. Yto Barrada and Charlotte Collins, "Morocco Unbound: An Interview with Yto Barrada," *openDemocracy*, May 16, 2006, www.opendemocracy.net/arts-photography/barrada_3551.jsp.

Kader Attia, installation view of *Holy Land,* 2007
Ninety mirrors, dimensions variable

the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline experiences."[20]

In physical terms, the third space may be explored in situations in which a subject is presented in terms of her origin and destination, as well as the relationship of desires at play in her immigration. On the beach on the island of Fuerteventura (one of Spain's Canary Islands), 90 large mirrors in the shape of pointed arches jut up from the sand. These forms, which are reminiscent of a seaside graveyard, were installed by French-Algerian artist Kader Attia as part of the 1st Art, Landscape & Architecture Biennial of the Canary Islands.[21] From a position out on the water, the glinting light on the mirrors acts as a beacon, drawing in people who are at sea; yet in certain situations the reflections may actually be blinding and seem to repel. The work serves as a metaphor for the lived situations of migration between shores, including the particular route of sub-Saharan Africans to the

20. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 218.
21. Kader Attia's work *Rochers Carrés* (2008) is included in the exhibition.

Canary Islands as a means to reach Europe. For migrants who are out at sea in makeshift boats, hoping to reach land, the mirrors may serve to emphasize the present moment within their journey, allowing them to realize the multiple possibilities inherent in their present space. However, if this space is realized only in transitional terms, the focus is removed from the present and placed always on the past or future. In some parlances, this midway space is known as limbo.

The term *limbo* has historically been employed to describe situations of varied temporal dimensions.[22] In some cases, limbo connotes an endless situation, rather than a singular moment. Here, because of the unattainability of other spaces (even as the term inherently acknowledges that they exist), it does not allow potential therein. An interpretation of limbo as transitional, on the other hand, does emphasize the past and future, but necessarily removes the power of the present moment. However, this conception may be overcome: as migrants are aware of their past, and, specifically, the suffering of their past, they act in the present to break free from this oppression. As Benjamin writes, "the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight."[23] Thus, in the case of the migrant, his spatial position may be understood as a potential space of rupture.

Charles Heller, in his chapter "Crossroads at the Edge of the World: Sub-Saharan Transit Migration in Morocco," in *The Maghreb Connection: Movements of Life Across North Africa* (an exhibition catalogue organized by Ursula Biemann), looks at a number of possible paths of migrants through Morocco, ending in particular ports that

22. The theoretical history of the term limbo includes a series of theological discussions, which provide an interesting, though tangential, comparison to worldly situations. In *The Coming Community*, for example, Giorgio Agamben suggests an alternate view of a state of limbo than that of the oft-invoked tormented state of nothingness. Speaking about a religious state of limbo, as it exists in Christianity, Agamben wrote, "The greatest punishment—the lack of the vision of God—thus turns into a natural joy: Irremediably lost, they [those in limbo] persist without pain in divine abandon. God has not forgotten them, but rather they have always already forgotten God; and in the face of their forgetfulness, God's forgetting is impotent. Like letters with no addressee, these uprisen beings remain without a destination. Neither blessed like the elected, nor hopeless like the damned, they are infused with a joy with no outlet." Giorgio Agamben, "From Limbo," in *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993 [orig. 1990]), 5–6.

23. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 257.

will serve as the launching points to outside countries. Heller contends that the spaces utilized by migrants, by those in an "in-between" or a "peripheral" state, may hold particular possibilities for achieving what Heller calls a "full world," because of the nature of the migrants' "egalitarian, multinational, democratic, [and] deterritorialized self-organiz[ation]":[24]

> In a completely organized political world, the only spaces that remain for the realization of such utopias are the same outlaw spaces that may see the worst violations of migrants' rights and lives. Their political meaning is inherently ambivalent. Outlaw spaces are thus fundamentally spaces of possibility both for the powerful and the powerless. [. . .] Either we remain trapped in closed, mutually destructive communities, while transnational violence and exploitation operate freely, or [. . .] we may constitute a transnational democratic formation capable of reappropriating our interconnectedness to other, truly common ends.[25]

With this view, Heller describes a hope within the space that migrants occupy between what are currently acknowledged as separate political areas, while as the same time acknowledging the perilous potentials of that space. In its separateness, this space may be compared to "exceptional space," such as described by Agamben in his seminal texts *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, and *State of Exception*. In moments conceived as "states of emergency," legal rights are temporarily suspended, but when these states are manifest in a space (Agamben's example is the camp), the temporary situation exists in spatial terms, which can become permanent in our acceptance of their legitimacy.[26] As members of the German architecture and theory journal *An Architektur* explained in their discussion of camps and other territorial forms,

24. Charles Heller, "Crossroads at the Edge of the World: Sub-Saharan Transit Migration in Morocco," in Ursula Biemann and Brian Holmes, *The Maghreb Connection: Movement of Life Across North Africa* (Barcelona: Actar, 2006), 134–5.

25. Ibid., 135.

26. I do not wish to conflate here the space of the camp with the spaces that may be occupied by migrants. Indeed, there may be significantly different circumstances that result in these situations. Rather, I hope to add another layer to the discussion of the migrant's space by looking to the discussion of the "space of exception," which has been examined at length in the example of the camp. I am not the only one to draw this comparison: a discussion of migration and the "state of exception" of the camp have appeared in Heller's chapter, among other examples.

"The camp is a kind of catalyst, which transforms the suspension of law into a new, permanent, spatial and legal order."[27] The atrocities that take place in such camps are made possible only through this suspended state. Indeed, the camp holds a paradoxical status in that what is "excluded" therein is actually captured through its spatial framework. As Agamben explains,

> Only because the camps constitute a space of exception [. . .]—in which not only is law completely suspended but fact and law are completely confused—is everything in the camps truly possible. [. . .] Whoever entered the camp moved in a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer made any sense.[28]

The outlaw space occupied by migrants, however, is precisely "outside"—it is not a space that has been recognized as exceptional to the law. This space is one in which the participants are aware of the positions they do not occupy, and they have disengaged themselves from the established rules that would govern them in those situations.

How do the youth occupying Kader Attia's *Rochers Carrés* (2008) (see p. 4–5) conceive of their space? As they sit atop the concrete forms, appreciating the physicality of these hulking things, the teenagers are aware of how the blocks exist in material space. The immediacy of their immensity is apparent, as the boys scale the forms to reach their prime vantage posts. Against their skin, they feel the warmth of the concrete that has been exposed to the sun all day. They also come here to rest and reflect; they catch the breeze here, the light wind that blows up from the sea. When they look out across that water, they think also of the land that lies on the far side, and the individuals that live there. Additionally, the youth understand that their own relative positions, on the Algerian shore (as well as the histories that led here), have shaped their recognition of the *Rochers*

27. Oliver Clemens, Jesko Fezer, Kim Förster, Sabine Horlitz (*An Architektur*), "Extra-Territorial Spaces and Camps: Judicial and Political Spaces in the 'War on Terrorism,'" in *Territories* (Berlin and Cologne: KW Institute for Contemporary Art and Walter König, 2003), 26.

28. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998 [orig. 1995]), 170.

Carrés. Indeed, a comprehensive conception of the space encourages inclusion of the dialectical relationships between these multiple divisions of space and of space-time.

These dialectical tensions continue to be useful in the consideration of spaces of possibility. In the effort to realize utopian possibilities anew, David Harvey posits that, "the task is to pull together a spatiotemporal utopianism—a dialectical utopianism—that is rooted in our present possibilities at the same time as it points towards different trajectories for human uneven geographical developments."[29] If spaces are solely conceived historically, then the narrative imposed upon them remains fixed. The potential of constellation between the past and the present, on the other hand, is generative: the multiplicity of the future is not foreclosed when the inherent possibility of space in the present moment is realized.

29. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 196.

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Roya Rastegar

Time is Money and Freedom is Free: Curatorial Practice, History, and the Erotics of Freedom

Don't you want to be free? Yes, you. Freedom.
What are you going to do to be free?
—Farah Jasmine Griffin on the provocations of
Toni Cade Bambara's characters in *The Salt Eaters*[1]

If Audre Lorde called to ask, *Are you doing your work?*, I would have to respond that in a city where time is money, I am invested in reorganizing cultural spaces and disrupting the mechanisms by which value is protected for some, to the exclusion of many others. Curatorial work, as the practice of organizing physical and representational spaces, holds this very possibility. A valorization of whiteness in the United States is instantiated through a dominant ordering of time and protected by exclusionary legal, social, and cultural structures. This essay argues that rupturing this order of time would prompt a reorganization of spaces towards a more expansive notion of value and sense of self. I turn to Lorde's theorization of the erotic as a form of knowledge that generates critical paths for curatorial practices that might navigate across difference, legibility, audience, value, and exhibition, and I ground my engagement with the erotic in the artistic practices of Alma Lopez and Thomas Allen Harris. I discuss work that is not included in *Time Out of Joint* in order to open the purview of this exhibition, which identifies evocation as an artistic strategy to call forth the past into the present, and to use what is left out of this exhibition to stimulate critical questions that challenge exclusionary models of curating embedded within a dominant ordering of time and space. How can erotic knowledge be a guide from which curators might make room for what has been otherwise rendered illegible by a valorization of whiteness? What models and inspirations can curators glean from Harris and Lopez's artistic practices to refigure paradigms of temporality toward expansive spaces and more capacious senses of selves?

In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin distinguishes between two concepts of history: historicism and historical materialism. Historicism is an oppressive order of time based on an idea of "progress," in which the present is the redemptive product of the past and thus justifies the erasure or appropriation of all the injustice and destruction that has come before. This order of time is structured to protect the Victor's place within history and preserve his power through a constant declaration of a "state of emergency" in which the present is frozen into submission under the

fear of a treacherous future (which the state of emergency is presumably instated to guard against). But Benjamin describes this constant "state of emergency" as a decoy to the piles of catastrophe heaped upon one another ("the wreckage") that are brought about by a notion of progress. In this way, Benjamin writes that "the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule."[2]

As a young curator raised in exile from Iran, I carry Benjamin's concepts of history to read my own contemporary moment and place in the United States. Arguably, the foundational organizing principle for social-political life and economic value in the United States is based on the demarcation of a fantastical difference—race—and a valorization of whiteness, manifesting in pervasive inequity within social relations and material conditions.[3] The perspectives, experiences, and struggles of the oppressed are made either invisible or are appropriated to justify the dominant narrative of history, irreconcilable within historicism because they illumine the contradictions and ruptures that "progress" works to smooth into a seamless chain of events. History textbooks used in classrooms reflect a dominant understanding of the Civil Rights movements as a continuous part of the "progress" of the American Dream, an inevitable outcome of the principles upon which the United States was based (life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness), even as it has used and continues to use those same principles to disenfranchise, murder, and oppress.[4]

This dominant order of history relies on organizations of both physical land and representation in civic, cultural, and public life around racial difference to weave hierarchical value and inequity into the fabric of everyday life.[5] Approaching difference from a legal framework, Cheryl Harris demonstrates how violence and an imposed rule of law subjugated Black and Native American peoples through racially contingent forms of property and property rights. She writes: "The concept of whiteness was premised on white supremacy rather than mere difference. 'White' is defined and constructed in ways that increased its value by reinforcing its exclusivity [. . .] the concept of whiteness is built on both exclusion and racial subjugation."[6] In this way, whiteness in the United States evolved from a racial identity to a form of property that is both historically codified and presently protected through legal structures. Harris articulates how whiteness became the basis for racialized privilege and allocating private and public benefits within social and cultural realms, which continued in subtler forms even after legal segregation

ended. The inflated valorization of whiteness is preserved through exclusionary practices of claiming physical, psychic, and representational spaces for some, toward the marginalization and disenfranchisement of others. As such, much scholarship has compellingly examined the way that political borders, processes of urbanization, and penal codes have been organized around difference, significantly shaping subjectivity, identity formations, cultural production, and social relations.[7] This valuation around race has been so deeply entrenched that race has become the constituting aspect around which many differences have been produced, so that identities concerning gender, class, and sexuality are themselves *racialized*.[8]

Poet and scholar Audre Lorde writes that "it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation."[9] This "misnaming" and "refusal to recognize" differences are a problem of legibility—not being able to read and recognize as valuable any other way of being outside our own. Lorde explains how difference is mobilized towards the production of wealth through these exclusionary practices:

> Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have *all* been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate.[10]

What are the implications for perpetuating this exclusionary model of difference within the practices of organizing cultural spaces? As many artists and scholars have argued, institutions like museums are dynamic structures that both open space for work that critiques, challenges, and provokes dominant ideologies, as well as perpetuate the continued disenfranchisement of particular artists and audiences that challenge the foundational basis of those cultural institutions.[11] Curatorial work, as a material, discursive, and spatial practice, especially when ensconced within a broad network of museums and galleries, carries political, social, and economic implications in terms of the value it produces and the representational and physical spaces it occupies. How does difference figure in curatorial

practice? How might curatorial approaches serve to make legible those differences not already recognized as valuable?

Lorde's notion of the erotic offers a potential tool for navigating spaces of illegibility.[12] Derived from the Greek word *eros*, whose personification is born of Chaos, the erotic connotes sexual desire and the arousal of the senses. Lorde's poetic employment of the word complicates this popular understanding by distinguishing between *sensation*, which is prompted externally (something you see, hear, touch, or smell—or that watches, listens, touches, or smells you), and *feeling*, which is generated from within. The erotic can be taken up as a critical mode of knowing that "rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge" and is "firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed and unrecognized feeling."[13] Lorde separates the erotic from its confused degeneration into "the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation" of the pornographic, which she notes is "a direct denial of the power of the erotic," which suppresses feeling for the aggrandizement of sensation alone.[14] The erotic has been dismissed as a valid form of knowledge because it challenges dominant modes of engaging with one another and understanding ourselves. As "a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feeling,"[15] the erotic requires one's identity be brought to bear on what one feels and how one knows.

Lorde's understanding of the erotic can be seen as operating within Benjamin's second concept of history: historical materialism. Benjamin articulates this concept of history from a racialized position of subjugation, that of a German Jew living stateless in the midst of Nazi-Fascist power and struggling to be recognized by institutions of higher education. Benjamin recognizes his life as structured by a dominant historicist model of history and urgently seeks to articulate another concept of history that would enable a radical rupture in the operations of power by revealing the catastrophes and breaking the order of the Victor's time. Contextualized within a "tradition of the oppressed," historical materialism establishes an evocative relationship with the past—a calling forth of incongruous images, pictures, memories, that are to be "seized," "grasped," recognized within a "moment of danger" as it "flashes up" in the present.[16] At the very time his life is under siege, Benjamin advocates for an alternate temporality cultivated through an erotic knowledge—a newfound space within which to inhabit a multiple, non-hierarchical constellation of times.

Alma Lopez, *Our Lady*, 1999
Digital print, 14 x 17.5 in. (35.6 x 44.5 cm)

This refiguring of history developed through an erotic register is taken up within the artistic practices of multimedia artist Alma Lopez and documentary filmmaker Thomas Allen Harris, whose modes of reorganizing space and expanding a notion of self illuminate possibilities for a curatorial practice that follows suit.[17]

Raised in Austin, Texas and currently living in Los Angeles, Lopez is an established artist who has received much acclaim and critical attention within different communities globally for her work in various mediums, from video to painting, and most notably her digital prints, in which she often appropriates various historical, religious,

Alma Lopez, *La Llorona Desperately Seeking Coyolxauhqui*, 2003
Serigraph, 16 x 22 in. (40.6 x 55.9 cm)

and mythical images.[18] To these dominant representational spaces, she brings contemporary formations of queer Chicana kinship and culture to bear. Her work, most notably *Our Lady* (1999), has faced much resistance from those entrenched in preserving these images as exclusive to a religious, dominant order of what it means to be Catholic or Mexican-American.[19] Through this reorganization of representational spaces, Lopez creates a new visual language that centers the contemporary positions of herself and her communities.[20] In the photo-based serigraph, *La Llorona Desperately Seeking Coyolxauhqui* (2003), Lopez invokes the epidemic of murders of young women in Juarez over the past 15 years, victims targeted on account of their gender and class. The pink background, referencing

the organizers who put pink crosses around Juarez to bring attention to these murders, is the background into which Lopez positions her model, a friend, mirroring the pose of the pictures of the women within the missing persons posters. By placing her living friend into the place of representation of one of these missing young women, Lopez forges a connection between the past and the present to reveal the connections between the racialized processes of gendering that women both in her own community and in Juarez are vulnerable to. The artist uses imagery from stories steeped in cultural and religious heritage to refigure the histories from their dominant readings as tragic figures to forge relationships guided through the erotic, a recognition of one's position and from there, a building of coalitions between Lopez's friends and loved ones and the women fighting for their lives in Juarez.[21]

Curating Lopez's work requires certain legibility of this refigured history in order to create a space for its exhibition and valuation. But how can one curate work that occupies a different position from one's own within a larger social, political landscape? I was introduced to Lopez's work in Santa Cruz at a festival devoted to film and art by women of color. I developed a relationship with that work by drawing on an erotic knowledge cultivated over time which formed "a bridge between the sharers [. . .] the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference."[22] Her work became increasingly legible to me as I was schooled through conversations, laughter, meals, and films shared with the people from the communities out of which Lopez's work grows. But it was not through my physical presence alone that I came to a fuller appreciation of Lopez's work, but because of my commitment to recognizing the struggles of her communities as my own. Lorde asserts that "the erotic cannot be felt secondhand,"[23] emphasizing the importance of developing interpersonal connections from a starting point of one's own position, which in turn can form the basis for collective action reordering dominant conceptions of time, space, and ideology. She writes that for "those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference" survival has meant learning "how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*"[24] These bonds

are cultivated through a "deep participation"[25] in developing connections between people towards recognition of how identities are formed differently, what different historical contexts have shaped them, and how they manifest differently within political, social, economic, and cultural spheres. This process calls for a dynamic conception of one's own personal identity.

Lorde has consistently asserted, as have many feminist theorists of color, the fluidity of identity as a formation, which is reinforced through her elaboration of the erotic as the measure between our "sense of self" and the "chaos of our strongest feelings." Because both are complicated, fluid, and always changing, erotic knowledge cannot come out of a fixed, static, and essential identity. Whiteness, in turn, relies on a pervasive instantiation of policies and structures to determine who is and who is not excluded from its parameters, protecting space only for those invested in participating in its valorization.

The work of Alma Lopez has received far less attention in a mainstream, profit-centered art world whose center in the United States is in New York. Curators must critically attend to the way that the physical place of cities and their audiences bear on what art is legible as relevant and valuable. The idea of "good" art that successfully communicates a universal message must be problemized. Who the audiences in cultural spaces are and how they identify with and come to occupy a cultural space impacts the art's reception and the possibility of transforming the viewer. It is in this way that the viewer might account for the conditions of their understanding and emotionally connecting to this "universal message"—conditions that are premised upon an unmarked, invisible, but nevertheless exclusively shared connection of histories, positions, experiences, and desires that valorize whiteness. I am not merely advocating for the inclusion of art that is not already legible. Work that has been de-contextualized from the communities of people from which it is produced or in dialogue with, either through exclusionary organizations of physical spaces or a lack of understanding of those histories, limits the extent that work can be legible. Otherwise, curators risk re-inscribing inclusions and exclusions from physical and representational spaces by distorting and subsuming the meaning of the art into a framework that only further entrenches the white supremacy. This is in line with the larger failure of multicultural discourse over the past 30 years. While purporting to equalize differences, multiculturalism preserves the parameters in which whiteness has been historically embedded

and protected as valuable. Based within a redemptive model of celebrating differences, multiculturalism is an incorporative model of dealing with differences that denies the cumulative, intergenerational effects of producing and protecting advantages for whiteness. As such, multiculturalism deals with difference by merely "calling it even," effectively deracinating these differences from their historically entrenched conditions that have manifested in severe, oppressive inequities (to begin with, in terms of access to adequate housing, education, cultural spaces, and civic participation). Curators must address the exclusions of people and their social, historical, and cultural conditions from within cultural spaces. As the work of Lorde read alongside Benjamin's conception of historical materialism indicates, a mode for doing this can be found in one's own erotic knowledge.

Drawing upon that knowledge would first mean starting from one's sociopolitical position within the world and from there, to build an understanding of how differences are "non-dominant," interconnected, and constitutive of one another. For curators entrenched in a possessive investment of whiteness (whether personally or through the network of artists, galleries, museums, and critics they work within), it is through a recognition of one's erotic knowledge that their positions of privilege are made visible as built through the exclusion and devaluation of other perspectives, histories, and cultures. Curators must acknowledge the "interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal" towards a fundamental disruption of whiteness as property.

One realization of this may lie in the artistic and curatorial practice of Thomas Allen Harris. His most recent endeavor, the *Digital Diaspora Family Reunion*, creates a public context for sharing private archives of photographs, articles, videos, artifacts, and audio of family, friends, and people not yet named but whose presence is documented. Through a touring roadshow format and an online multimedia platform, the project opens spaces (physical and virtual) to collect, analyze, and build into a public archive those materials currently held in the personal realm of dusty family albums and storage chests. Within these images, Harris writes, is "the story of a people and how they made their way from the deprivation of slavery and the indignities of discrimination to forming vibrant communities whose rhythms and style have influenced and defined global culture."[26]

The roadshow aspect of the project, touring since 2007, provides the "bricks and mortar specificity" of physically connecting and providing the opportunity for interpersonal engagements, gathering people together in cities across the nation (most recently, Atlanta, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.) at community centers, museums, colleges, libraries, schools, and cultural events.[27] Performing as the "host" of these shows, Harris facilitates the dynamic transformation of the standard exhibition model of artist/audience/object by encouraging an intergenerational and inter-gendered exchange around the photographs. Audiences evolve into curators, artists, historians, publicly sharing their private archives and personal knowledge to write history collaboratively. People are encouraged to make geographical and personal connections among families and acquaintances, as well as to contribute knowledge to the public process of unearthing, documenting, and archiving. In a recent stop, for example, during a presentation of a photograph from a private collection, the question arose as to the meaning behind an unknown insignia in the shape of Africa worn on the sleeve of a military uniform; a member of the audience who had served in the army at that time was able to identify it. In this way, the roadshow presents the discovery process as a communal endeavor that makes more nuanced one's history through building shared analyses around the differences within the photographs. This method of writing history to highlight and build upon the mutuality of differences disrupts the formation of a static identity and monolithic way of understanding ourselves. It departs radically from a single narrative of history based on the elision of these differences as mutual alone. As participation increases over time and across places, more people in photographs can be named and connected, fortifying an ever-expanding notion of family that provides the over-arching framework from which to explore more deeply one's own identity.

Grounded in the roadshow element, an online component of *Digital Diaspora Family Reunion* will be launched in fall 2009 as a springboard from which to further connect people across the nation and around the world. People can upload their photographs, stories, and other artifacts within a multimedia platform that organizes the materials visually into an interactive map, tracing the migrations of families across places and times. This online portion of the project plans to include mechanisms and interfaces to especially elicit participation from youth, while an educational program is also being

planned to involve students from elementary through high school. In this way, youth can reclaim these images as a significant force by refiguring and creating a generative history in which they recognize themselves as part of a larger project. Participants are encouraged to construct films, slideshows, and other media that narrate new stories and histories through the public archive, making evermore tangible the relevance of interconnected histories to our present moment.

Harris's approach is grounded in a collaborative methodology that infuses dynamism into his authorial position by disrupting his position as the singular artist and the audience's role as passive spectators or consumers. His work develops alongside the intellectual and archival resources contributed by the Museum of African Diaspora in San Francisco, the Howard University archives, foremost scholar on Black photography, Deborah Willis, and various youth groups around the country.[28] Those who attend the roadshow curate themselves and their histories into a public space in concert with one another. His approach to the archive as an active and living organism builds new knowledges and representations around history through a piecing together of one's sense of self across time and place. A site is created where one can see one's differences as interconnected with those of others and become personally invested, on an affective register, in a history, experience, and background that may not be recognized immediately as connected to one's own. This speaks to Lorde's emphasis on the erotic as a guide through which to live.

> When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's.[29]

Central to Harris's artistic practice over the past 15 years has been a disrupting of traditional forms of authorial control in order to expand the possibilities of creating spaces (physical and representational) that are multidimensional. For example, in an interview with Laura Harris concerning his documentary *Vintage: Families of Value* (1995), which profiles three queer, Black siblings, the filmmaker reflects on the constructed nature of narratives of history and knowledge and relays the importance of opening up the editing process to the documentary's subjects.[30] Harris works to recognize what is being

left out of the representational realm by troubling the authority of the artist's position to allow for a multiplicity of perspectives. In doing so, "Black," "queer," and "family" are revealed as nuanced and changing through the dynamic interplay between the private space of the family and the public platform of the film itself. Michael Renov writes that in *Vintage*, "the familial other helps to flesh out the very contours of the enunciating self," and in this way, "[d]ifference and repetition, self and community, race and sexuality are experienced as interpenetrating categories, mutually determining (indeed undecidable) rather than contradictory or self-cancelling."[31] Likewise, *Digital Diaspora Family Reunion* works as a roadmap through different modalities of Black families and through this, expanding the parameters of social relations, history, identity, and even race itself. Through one's own "deep participation" with this project of reclaiming space "at the interstices of private and public," one's place within history is made visible and negotiable, expanding a sense of self to make room for all those that have made their "lives richer and more possible."[32]

What model does *Digital Diaspora Family Reunion* and Harris's artistic practice inspire in curatorial practice? How might recognizing one's own position within a dominant order of time and space shift the way we curate and occupy exhibition spaces? Embedded within a network of market-based processes of valuation, curators can use erotic knowledge to navigate the obstacles and invisibilities created through "external directives." This was of central concern to Lawrence Alloway in 1975, when he described the curator's entrapped position within the "artist-dealer-collector triad [that] has a monopolistic hold on art which acts to limit its interaction with society."[33] After delineating the problematics around curating within market-based demands of exclusionary practice in order to produce and maintain value of artwork, Alloway asserts the importance of reclaiming the educative nature of curating. Given the central concern for educational theorists since Rousseau has been about making the knowledge within one's self manifest in one's everyday practice and way of life, Harris's refiguring of public and private space to understand the self can be seen as both curatorial as well as a pedagogical imperative.

Indeed, creating cultural and pedagogical spaces have been the terrain in which many Black radical feminists have worked toward freedom. This practice of freedom is a radical spatial reorganization—an opening up of representational, physical, and psychic spaces from

the constrictions of exclusionary ways of understanding life based on a valorization of any difference. The erotic is a way of opening up time in order to produce an alternate relationship to space, and glean from it an expanded sense of self. Within the work of novelist, scholar, and filmmaker Toni Cade Bambara, the possibilities for freedom are located within these spaces of "ever-widening circles" within constellations of time that "exist in fluid manifestations of its various dimensions" and generate multiple understandings of ourselves and others.[34] Releasing ourselves from fixed, dominant conceptions of time, space, and self initiates the opportunity to be shaped by what we do not know and allows for the generation of histories within multiple, complex cosmologies and worldviews that provide an alternative to a bleached-out grand narrative of "progress." A curatorial practice run through this erotic register forbears the subsuming of art into a unified valuation system and instead achieves expanded paradigms of legibility and value, opening a way through which we can "descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being."[35] For Lorde and Bambara, the purpose of organizing time and space is to create a different relationship with the future, one that "makes our lives and the lives of our children richer and more possible." In this way, the stakes of curating and teaching can both be recognized as a way to "expand and make more capacious our notion of freedom."[36] This can be named an "erotics of freedom"—a representational and spatial practice that delves into the chaos of knowledge and feelings at the same time, emerging with rearranged desires, and a more capacious vision of ourselves, the world, and our possibilities of freedom.

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1. Farah Jasmine Griffin, "Toni Cade Bambara: Free to Be Anywhere in the Universe," *Callaloo* 19.2 (1996), 229.

2. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968 [orig. 1940]), 257.

3. My description of race as a fantastical concept is aligned with Paula Ioanide's articulation of cultural fantasies as "dominant racialized and gendered constructions that structure public intelligibilities, affective responses, frames of reception, and interpretation." She distinguishes between cultural fantasies and racial stereotypes or myths that can be "consciously refuted" to explore the ways these fantasies function

"as social forces that make injustices against a particularly racialized and gendered group or individual appear normative, natural, and necessary." Paula Ioanide, "The Story of Abner Louima: Cultural Fantasies, Gendered Racial Violence, and the Ethical Witness," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 13.1 (2007): 7–8.

4. Some key scholarship that examines how contemporary articulations of colorblind ideology are enabled by an obstinate notion of "progress" even as structural inequality on the basis of race and gender persists: Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality* (Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) and *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post–Civil Rights Era* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001); Linda Faye Williams, *The Constraint of Race* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Patricia J. Williams, *Seeing a Color-Blind Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998); Michael K. Brown, et. al. *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

5. Whiteness has been protected consciously and with great intention. In his critical historiography *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*, W.E.B. Du Bois documents that in the period of during Radical Reconstruction (1865–1877), Black people worked to revolutionize socioeconomic formations by disrupting the foundations of wealth, property, and state based on white supremacy. In the chapter "Counter-Revolution of Property," Du Bois argues that this moment of immense transformative possibility was thwarted by a "counterrevolution of property" in which legal, economic, political, and social structures were instantiated to assert the sovereignty of whiteness—even across class.

6. Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106.8 (1993), 1737, 1724–36.

7. See: George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Stuart Hall, et. al.; *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Ruth Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2007); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London and New York: Verso, 1990) and *Planet of Slums* (London and New York: Verso, 2006).

8. For nuanced analysis around the racialization of gender: Audre Lorde, "Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Berkley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 60–65; of sexuality: Patricia Hill Collins, "Prisons for Our Bodies, Closets for Our Minds: Racism, Heterosexism, and Black Sexuality," in *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, 86–117; of class: W.E.B. DuBois, "Counter-Revolution of Property," in *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Free Press, 1998 [orig. 1935]), 580–636.

9. Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" in *Sister Outsider*, 115.

10. Ibid.

11. Some of the artists committed to this practice of institutional critique include Andrea Fraser, Coco Fusco, Fred Wilson, and Hans Haacke.

12. "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" is meant as what Lorde calls a "progression"—an early articulation based on her initial perceptions that serves as a launching point from which to further develop the notion of the erotic and its uses. In "An Interview: Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich," in *Sister Outsider*, 81.

13. Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider*, 53.

14. Ibid., 54

15. Ibid.

16. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 255.

17. While exhibition catalogue essays conventionally undertake aesthetic evaluations of artwork, I emphasize the necessity of recognizing one's social, political, and economic position in order to acknowledge the different parameters in which representational strategies and aesthetic practices can be made legible.

18. I should note that by "community," I am talking about a dynamic and porous configuration of people who (even if tenuously and with many contestations) share a sense of identity or experience grounded within cultural, religious, regional, national, and racial formations/positions.

19. In the spring of 2001, a controversy arose around Lopez's piece *Our Lady* when the "patriarchal Catholic" community deemed it "sacrilegious" and demanded its removal from an exhibit of cyber art at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico. See www.almalopez.net.

20. For aesthetic evaluations that are informed by the social, political, and cultural contexts in which Lopez's work operates, see the forthcoming collection of essays edited by Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma Lopez's Irreverent Apparition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010 [scheduled]).

21. By way of a very brief reading: the roses and the patterned flowers in the background recall the Virgen de Guadelupe. On her chest is a profile of Coyolxauhqui, Aztec Warrior Goddess of the Moon, who evokes the importance of remembering and collecting the pieces of self that history has broken. The figure of La Llorona, the constantly grieving mother who was driven to drown her children, is imposed onto a background silhouette of the Mother Mary. The necklace of Qualitque, the mother of Coyolxauhqui, surrounds the model and is re-imaged in order to center the serpent's tongue as a symbol of the empowered voice of the young women of Juarez.

22. Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," 56.

23. Ibid., 59.

24. Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981), 98.

25. Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," 59.

26. Publicity materials provided by the artist, March 30, 2009.

27. Thomas Allen Harris, in conversation with the author, April 9, 2009.

28. Harris's most recent documentary film, *Through a Lens Darkly: Black Photographers and the Emergence of a People*, is inspired by Deborah Willis's book, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers from 1840 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002).

29. Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," 58.

30. Laura A. Harris, "Black Feminism and Queer Families: A Conversation with Thomas Allen Harris," *African American Review*, 36.2 (Summer 2002), 281–2.

31. "Domestic Ethnography and the Construction of the 'Other' Self," in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, eds. Jane Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 152.

32. Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," 55.

33. Lawrence Alloway, "The *Great Curatorial Dim-Out*," in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Sandy Nairne, and Bruce Ferguson (London: Routledge, 1996), 229.

34. Gloria Hull, "What It is I Think She's Doing Anyhow: A Reading of Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983), 124 and 138. For a diagram of the characters, locations, and events within *The Salt Eaters*, see 132–3.

35. Lorde, "The Master's Tool Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 99.

36. Angela Davis, keynote address (Black Women and the Radical Tradition Conference, Graduate Center for Worker Education, City University of New York, March 28, 2009).

Jakob Schillinger

Recessional Aesthetics: Artistic Practice and the Chrono-Logic of Capitalism

West 10th Street, New York, April 30, 2008: a small crowd gathers around a fistfight. Two guys punch and grab each other in rage, screaming something about art and the economy and the recession—and about Paul Chan.[1]

The artist has just given a sold-out talk titled "The Spirit of Recession" at the New School's Vera List Center for Art and Politics. What is it about this artist that compels, fascinates, and provokes people to such an extent? And what is it about this talk in particular that sparks so much controversy as to even incite a fistfight?

Paul Chan is a complicated and ambiguous figure. An artist embraced not only by the art market and major cultural institutions, he has also attracted a lot of critical interest, most of it celebratory, across a surprisingly broad spectrum of ideological positions.[2] In considering Chan, I am writing about an artist who raises a lot of the issues addressed in *Time Out of Joint,* ranging from the fundamental question of the emancipatory potential of art to the connection of temporality and the functioning of power, but to whom I relate ambivalently. I am, to be sure, fascinated by the *phenomenon* that is Paul Chan. The broad interest in his work and person, and especially the excitement about "The Spirit of Recession," seems motivated to a large degree by a certain interest in the philosophical paradigms that Chan invokes and which also make up the conceptual framework of this exhibition: a messianic concept of history (as put forth by Walter Benjamin in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History")[3] and the temporal structure of capitalism (as sketched out by Benjamin in "Capitalism as Religion").[4] Discussing the phenomenon that is Paul Chan allows me to reflect upon these concepts in a form in which a widely received figure has articulated them and to examine the way these critical models operate in that form. Another aspect that relates

1. Paul Chan and Maurizio Cattelan, "Some Things Just Stick in Your Mind," *Flash Art* 262 (October 2008), http://147.123.148.222/interno.php?pagina=intervista_det&id_art=198&det=ok&title=PAUL-CHAN.

2. A very few critics have addressed problems raised by Chan's work, especially his insistence on a strict separation of politics and art. See, for example: Paul Chan and Martha Rosler, *Paul Chan, Martha Rosler* (New York: A.R.T. Press, 2006); and André Rottmann, "Family of Strangers: An Interview with Paul Chan by André Rottmann," *Texte zur Kunst,* Vol. 17, Issue 67, 153–165.

3. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968 [orig. 1940]).

4. Walter Benjamin, "Capitalism as Religion," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings (Vol. 1: 1913–1926)*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996 [orig. 1921], 253–64).

Chan to this exhibition is our interest not only in the artists' respective practices per se, but in the discourses that form around them, to which we devote our catalogue as an equally important site of the project. Chan presents a model of artistic practice that not only acknowledges, but foregrounds—if in a problematic way—the discursive dimension of artistic production. That said, let me be clear: the aim of this essay is not to accuse Chan of creating a hype that simply works to raise the market value of his work. Rather, I want to ask what is it about the art world at this moment that produces a figure like Chan. What desires motivate its production and reception?

These are the questions that motivate me to discuss in depth an artist not included in this exhibition. Chan, in other words, serves as a case study. My thesis is that the phenomenon that is Paul Chan can be read as symptomatic of a certain conjuncture at our current moment: Chan marks the coinciding of a widespread disillusionment with politically engaged art; an emphasis on the production of depoliticized and highly aestheticized spectacular objects, stimulated by an exploding art market;[5] and at the same time the development in the critical art context of what has been labeled a "discursive model of praxis."[6] These tendencies within the art world are themselves symptomatic of—or reacting to—larger cultural and sociopolitical developments: the figure Paul Chan, I will argue, is produced by the conflict of the dominant accumulative model of time naturalized by capitalism and a non-accumulative messianic time (which I will locate in Benjamin). This conflict, more precisely the issue of temporality with regard to the emancipatory potential of art, is not only inscribed in the figure Paul Chan at large, but is explicitly addressed in his talk at the Vera List Center. "The Spirit of Recession" is one particular incidence of Chan's work that renders transparent the paradigm of his practice. A close reading of the work here will serve

5. Chan's talk at the Vera List Center takes place briefly before the collapse of the art market in the wake of larger economic decline. I consider the current "crisis" and the hopes for a restructuring of the art world towards less market-driven operations that this "crisis" generates later on in this essay. See page 96.

6. I take this notion from Liam Gillick, who writes: "A discursive model of praxis has developed within the critical art context over the last twenty years. It is the offspring of critical theory and improvised, self-organized structures. It is the basis of art that involves the dissemination of information. It plays with social models and presents speculative constructs both within and beyond traditional gallery spaces." Liam Gillick, "Maybe it would be better if we worked in groups of three? Part 1 of 2: The Discursive," *e-flux Journal* 2 (January 2009), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/35.

as both point of departure and point of reference in my discussion of the question of the emancipatory potential of art in the face of a destructive capitalism.

The Spirit of Recession

When invited to give an "artist talk" at the Vera List Center, Chan chose to not present, nor speak about, the art objects, projects, or interventions produced under his name. Instead, he read a paper titled "The Spirit of Recession," formulating both an analysis of a capitalist order whose destructiveness had just begun to emerge with striking clarity amidst privileged classes, and a position regarding the critical and even emancipatory potential of artistic practice with respect to this order.

"The Spirit of Recession" puts forth its critique of society as a critique of progress. Pointing out the striking parallels between the years 2008 and 1991, Chan insists that "despite the turning of a new century, things have not turned around. We still dance, with three similar beats, the same regressive rhythm: another Iraq war, another banking scandal, another recession."[7] The meaning of these events is defined by a discourse of emergency or *crisis*, dictating, as Chan puts it, "the fundamental marching order that directs the relentless pace of survival from above and from within." This discourse, in other words, enforces and naturalizes a rationality of self-interest. Following this rationality, the individual reproduces an *irrational* social whole: under the rule of an instrumental reason, society is nothing but the sum of competing individuals who believe they act in *their own* interest when, in fact, they act "in the interest of *self-interest*." The discourse of crisis and its logic of "survival of the fittest" does not allow individuals to understand that their *collective* interest is, in fact, *their own* best interest. "It becomes natural to sacrifice the lives and livelihoods of others in the name of prosperity, which is another word for progress." In the seemingly progressive process of mastery, each individual reproduces the hostile environment which mastery and domination were meant to render habitable in the first place. This is the unreason of instrumental reason.

It has been noted that, "when [Chan] talks, he consistently

7. Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from Chan are taken from an audio recording of his talk, accessible online at http://ps1.el.net/media/archive/mp3/sbarclh_paulchan_043008.mp3.

quotes other speakers, as if their voices inhabit his body."[8] The voice that is heard here and throughout "The Spirit of Recession"—though never cited—is that of Theodor W. Adorno.[9] Adorno serves as a frequent source of reference for Chan, who tirelessly reproduces not only the former's social critique, but especially his argument for autonomous art. In "The Spirit of Recession," however, before even turning to art, Chan brings in—this time properly citing—another voice: that of Walter Benjamin, whose fragment "Capitalism as Religion"[10] Chan uses to argue that the logic that Adorno refers to as "unreason" is, in fact, "religious." Thus, his argument goes, "secularization has not separated and freed us from divine authority, but has instead retooled it [. . .] displacing a heavenly hierarchy onto an earthly one. So grace becomes redescribed as progress, and sacrifice is elevated to a divine right. In our modern transfiguration, every exchange is an unwitting prayer for the continuance of the economic miracle."

Chan takes up Benjamin's image of capitalism as a never-ending service, as "the celebration of the cult *sans [t]reve et sans merci*"[11] to finally formulate his own metaphor for art: "the recessional." The term refers to the end of church service when the clergy departs and

8. Kitty Scott, "Paul Chan's Basket of Fruit," in *Paul Chan The 7 ~~Lights~~*, eds. Melissa Larner and Ben Fergusson (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2007), 60.

9. And more specifically, its echo in Robert Hullot-Kentor's 2004 essay "Adorno Without Quotations." In this essay, which is available on Chan's website as a free audio book, read by the artist himself, the acclaimed Adorno scholar and translator states: "The thesis of the Dialectic of Enlightenment [. . .] is that history regresses, because progress, as the progress of domination, is sacrificial. Sacrifice is shown to be a logic of substitution that develops as the principle of identity—the impulse of self-preservation itself—in an ever broadening web of the exchange relation. The exchange relation generically consumes the particular while the principle of identity constantly hides from view the sacrificial mayhem at the interior of the process. Reality is thus mastered, while the purpose of mastery, the possible satisfaction of the particular, is squandered. In the face of resources achieved at great price, and which society could well employ to satisfy its many wants and needs, progress is instead ever more blind to its purpose and ineluctably driven to become a demand for the sacrifice of the sacrificial whole. Thus images of the Great Depression return to American minds as puzzle-visions of farmers discreating surplus, putting an end to plenty, in order to survive scarcity: destroying produce and guttering tank loads of milk into open fields. In crisis, an unreasonable reason continues to call for sacrifice . . . " Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Adorno Without Quotations," in *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 160.

10. Benjamin, "Capitalism as Religion," 288–91.

11. Ibid., 288.

the congregation, singing a hymn, is left to themselves. In Chan's text, the recessional figures as an emancipatory moment, "for a church without authority is blessed indeed." It marks a "moment of [. . .] turning," "the beginning of another kind of time." Emancipation, in other words, figures for Chan as the end of history. And Chan (now without mentioning—but further following—Benjamin) conceives of the end of history in messianic terms, that is, as Judgment Day. This becomes clear when he parallels the recessional with a specific anecdote, one in which a banal accident that could have resulted in death has a friend of Chan's utter what she believes to be her last words. Choking on a fishbone, she turns to him and says, "I love you," and adds, "I want my book on nineteenth-century slave narratives back." Chan goes on to describe it as "a moment that froze in time with as much of eternity as I'm likely to know about"; of all her history, she recalls only what matters most to her in the here and now, insisting on the desires and demands she has postponed or repressed so far.

Chan stylizes this act as the archetype of artistic practice: it "inform[s] the aesthetic contours of anything worth making; in other words, the urgent play of shapes and colors and lines and spaces and sounds that matter most when something is stuck in one's throat." He presents the artistic act not merely in analogy to the messianic emancipatory moment, but equates the two. Art "matters most," because it evades and potentially negates the order that is. "To find the courage to say the very last words, and to make them sing like the recessional to the very last service, this is what I call art." The end of history as messianic moment provides Chan's model for art.

The Recessional

The recessional is a powerful image and it provides a seductive—yet very open—metaphor for emancipatory art. The decisive question, then, is: what does this last sentence of Chan's really mean? What does such art look like and how does it operate? Does it look and operate like the work Chan produces?

Chan's metaphor for art is marked by multiple contradictions, both on a purely theoretical level and in the relationship of its theoretical claims to the form of its articulation in Chan's practice. In the following, I want to examine and clarify Chan's argument by, on the one hand, further tracing the Benjaminian and Adornian figures that

produce it, and on the other hand, by relating it to Chan's practice,[12] in order to eventually untangle the figure of the recessional from how it is put to work by Chan.

If one reads "The Spirit of Recession" in the context of Chan's many interviews, artist talks, essays, and the articles published about him, it becomes clear that he aligns himself with the strict Adornian distinction between art and politics, with a claim for autonomous art.[13] One might argue then that Chan's use of Benjamin is merely instrumental: a voice of authority legitimating the conceptual leap that produces the recessional.[14] Chan's adherence to the Adornian conceptual framework leads to a strange disavowal of the Benjaminian impulse that nonetheless pervades his text, which itself continues to be infected with Benjamin's highly seductive figures of thought. When, after Benjamin's brief cameo, Chan realignes himself with Adorno, Benjamin's messianism still resonates: Chan's choking scene is a perfect illustration of the "moment of danger" in Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in which "the true image of the past [. . .] flashes up,"[15] while Chan's "moment that [freezes] in time with as much eternity as I am likely to know about" is analogous to Benjamin's conception of the temporality of "the now,"[16] conceived in opposition to the temporality of progress inherent in the systems of domination and oppression.

Benjamin's argument derives from his overlaying of two considerations, one theological and the other philosophical: the Judeo-Christian idea of Judgment Day (the last day that ruptures history

12. Chan's diverse practice is comprised of video animations, drawings, political activism, authoring theoretical essays, hosting a website on which he makes available (among other things) free audio books read by him, and the recent staging of *Waiting for Godot* in post-Katrina New Orleans. I am focusing almost exclusively on his talk at the Vera List Center, which I want to argue is representative of, and to some degree paradigmatic for, Chan's practice, in that Chan puts much emphasis on (and undoubtedly energy into) the discursive framing of his activities and persona.

13. Practically any article on Chan mentions his separation of art and politics or activism. See, for example: Nell McClister, "Paul Chan," *Bomb Magazine* 92 (Summer 2005), 25; "Portfolio–What does it mean to make art during war time?" *Modern Painters* Vol. 20, Issue 3 (April 2008); and Johanna Burton, "Paul Chan: Greene Naftali Gallery," *Artforum* Vol. 43, Issue 5 (January 2005), 181–2.

14. This move (citing Benjamin as a voice of authority) is itself opposed to the Adornian logic Chan claims to align himself with. See Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Adorno Without Quotations,": 154–68.

15. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 255 (translation slightly altered).

16. Ibid., 261.

and transcends it)[17] and the Hegelian-Marxist end of history (a liberated mankind that has overcome class distinctions and class struggle). The overlaying of these two figures produces the liberation of the oppressed as Judgment Day.

Benjamin's "Jetztzeit" ("the now")[18] is of the same quality as the end of history, if at a low intensity: in the act of "writing history"[19] (Benjamin is playing on the double meaning of the expression, using writing to mean not recording, but making history), the historical materialist echoes the figure of the Messiah on Judgment Day. "The now" is conceived by Benjamin as the time in which the historical materialist cites the "image of the past as it flashes up in a moment of danger,"[20] thereby mobilizing past moments by "blast[ing them] out of the continuum of history."[21] Writing history, in this historical-materialist sense, is a process of fragmentation, of destroying the continuity of the linear time of historicism that puts the past at a distance and makes past events things of the past. "The concern of history," according to Benjamin, is "our view of the past."[22] Our view of the past—our relation to it—becomes effective through techniques that actualize dialectical constellations of past and present, techniques that Benjamin codes in aesthetic terms. We have, in the context of this exhibition, termed these techniques *evocation*. Evocation is a "tiger's leap into the past."[23] It can take different forms: either that of fashion ("in the arena where the ruling class gives the commands") or that of revolutionary struggle ("in the open air of history").[24]

Even if Benjamin does not explicitly mention art here,[25] in his distinction he implies only two spaces in which the artist can function, "the arena. . ." and "the open air. . . ," thereby implying an absolute refusal of autonomous art. This is in almost complete contrast with

17. Judgment Day figures as the only just court case, for only the all-knowing Messiah is able to cite each moment of history, to evoke each moment and make it bear on the present in form of his judgment. Any secular court cannot be just, for its knowledge of history is only partial and is corrupted by manipulation and the selection processes of worldly authorities.

18. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 261.

19. Ibid., 262.

20. Ibid., 255.

21. Ibid., 261.

22. Ibid., 254.

23. Ibid., 261.

24. Ibid.

25. He does so explicitly in "The Author As Producer" (trans. John Heckmanin), *New Left Review* 62 (July/August 1970 [orig. 1934]), 83–96.

Adorno, who states: "This is not a time for political art, but politics has migrated into autonomous art, and nowhere more so than where it seems to be politically dead."[26] In an "age of mechanical reproduction" of art, Benjamin sees emancipatory potential in an art transformed into mass culture; however, Adorno concedes no emancipatory potential to art whatsoever and sees any engagement with mass culture as ultimate corruption. For Adorno, every work of art, like any other object, is inscribed in the totality of social relations.[27] What distinguishes the critical work of art from other objects (and from affirmative or committed works of art) is that it does not hide this fact. On the contrary, it establishes a mimetic relationship to reality, in that the experience of the work represents the intolerability of that reality: the alienation that instrumental reason (i.e., "unreason") subjects all particulars to, the destructive effects it has on the subject. The maximum critical potential that Adorno is ready to concede to art is that after the encounter with such a work, one is to have "lost forever both any peace with the world and any chance of consoling [oneself] with the judgment that the way of the world is bad."[28] For Adorno, the artwork can be critical at best—but never emancipatory.

The conflict that Chan's combination of Benjaminian and Adornian ideas thus produces is telling. It reflects the artist's ambivalence: a disillusionment with activist and committed art and, at the same time, a desire and urge to understand (or frame) his practice as politically engaged.[29]

The resulting ambiguity marks a larger tendency in the art world today. One might well argue that the Benjaminian "Author as Producer" model, written with Soviet Communism as an existing alternative in mind, is no longer valid, since there is no unified revolutionary struggle that the author-as-producer could align, identify, and integrate herself with. If one historicizes Benjamin's writings, however, one can abstract the theoretical framework from the specifics of the moment. Soviet Communism for Benjamin stands for a

26. Theodor W. Adorno, "Committment" (trans. Francis McDonagh), *New Left Review* 87–88 (September–December 1974), 89.

27. Ibid., 86. "There is no material content, no formal category of an artistic creation, however mysteriously changed and unknown to itself, which did not originate in the empirical reality from which it breaks free. It is this which constitutes the true relation of art to reality, whose elements are regrouped by its formal laws."

28. Ibid., 87.

29. Chan works both in the field of activism and in an "autonomous" art market, and on a discursive level insists on the total separation between the two. See note 13.

radical negation of accumulative time and structures of domination since it actualizes the messianic end of history in Benjamin's here and now. Evidence of this distinction is found, for example, in "Capitalism as Religion," the text cited by Chan in order to code capitalist "unreason" as "religious," where Benjamin puts forth a *critique* of Marxism on the basis of the same messianic thought. Marxism, he writes in 1921, is essentially capitalist, for it follows a capitalist "religious," that is accumulative chrono-logic.

Capitalism as Religion

Benjamin's "Capitalism as Religion" highlights the crucial moment in Chan's metaphor of the recessional: it is the authorities that leave; the congregation stays, does not move. For Benjamin, capitalism is not a church that one could leave, but the very act of leaving, of moving on. Religious capitalism is not simply a condition that must be endured, a state that can be left behind, but is the very "movement"[30] of attempting to leave behind. For capitalism is based on a fundamental belief in an accumulative time, a continuous, homogenous, empty time that is to be filled with labor for steady improvement and advancement. The way out for Benjamin, thus, cannot be to change tracks and follow a different path, because the very act of moving on—on any path whatsoever—is governed by the accumulative chrono-logic that defines capitalism.

When Benjamin critiques capitalism as being essentially religious, this does not mean that he calls for secularization. Benjamin's critique never concerns religion as such; what is problematic in capitalism is that it shares a particular religious concept of time, particularly Christianity's time of promise (which opens the perspective for a linear time—as opposed to this, in the circular time of antiquity, there could be no investment), but does not conceive of repentance, of a turn-around or *Umkehr*. Capitalism is exclusively directed toward the future; it is one never-ending procession. But it is precisely *Umkehr*—not as a movement, but as its arrest—that, through its disrupting any continuity of time, "leads to," or rather makes present, the origin, ground zero, repentance that defines the "authentic" (i.e., Jewish) religion.[31]

30. Benjamin, "Capitalism as Religion," 288.

31. This Judaic messianism can also be traced throughout Benjamin's late writings; it is only coded differently—put in different terms—after his conversion to

It is Benjamin's messianic conception of power in its relation to temporality that makes his figures of thought (and their resurfacing in Chan's talk) so interesting and urgent at this moment, in that they address the current state of disillusion, the perceived condition of "no outside" (to the market, to capitalism), and still allow for rupture, emancipation, and radical change. With the messianic, Benjamin conceptualizes a different form of power.

Reading "Capitalism as Religion" alongside the later "Theses on the Philosophy of History" reveals the continuity and specificity of Benjamin's messianism and helps to abstract its principle. In the "Theses," Benjamin conceives of the relationship of past and present along Freudian-Nietzschean lines. The past figures as a history of desires frustrated and injustices suffered, exerting a low but constant pressure on the present: a "weak messianic force." This force is not a sovereign power, not a power that can be possessed by a sovereign subject; this force is a relation to the past that constitutes the historical subject as the agent of itself.

For Benjamin, our only affective relationship is with the past. The messianic relationship to the past as conceived by Benjamin not only mobilizes affect—the "hatred and spirit of sacrifice"[32] that are, in his view, essential as a driving force for emancipatory change. It constitutes an "us," or in Benjamin's Marxist terms, the subject of history, "the struggling, oppressed class itself."[33]

Implicit in the "spirit of sacrifice" is a collective identification, distinguishing Benjamin's model from any Freudianism that may have informed it; a collective identification that Chan does not account for.

Following this model, any struggle against domination hinges on a certain relationship to the past, a certain concept of history. But the dominant ideology, establishing a temporality of progress, constantly works to repress the past and direct all attention towards a better future. In Benjamin's view, this time that is located in the future is an illusion: in reality, we do not have this time; the only time we have is "the now," a present saturated with the past. "Progress" establishes a

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Marxism. In 1921, he identified the religious structure of capitalism; in the late "Theses" (1940), he equips historical materialism with theological method: the famous hunchback dwarf (theology) in the puppet (historical materialism) "can easily be a match to anyone." Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 253.

32. Ibid., 260. By "spirit of sacrifice" Benjamin means collective identification: self-sacrifice for others, not the sacrifice of others in the spirit of survival.

33. Ibid.

chrono-logic of oppression and individuation, forever postponing "the now" in which the historical subject could form and act. The "messianic force" is the undoing of this power of domination that is progress.

What is crucial here is that Benjamin conceives of this messianic end of history not as a singular event; he envisions not—in a literal sense—the arrival of the Messiah as the other, but a *messianic mode* of being at the end of history. The rupture that is the end of history is conceived as heterogeneous, but as always already latent; it is the "weak messianic force," to be unfolded through a messianic way of being.

The "messianic force" is a force that undoes power, and it fundamentally differs from the power that it seeks to undo because it cannot be accumulated (in the form of a political project, for example); it is, on the contrary, the negation of accumulative time.[34]

The possibility of emancipatory art in this conception hinges on the question of the quality and temporality of power. It is in this respect that Chan becomes problematic, and ever more symptomatic of the current moment. For it is not entirely clear in "The Spirit of Recession" where the power for the emancipatory artistic act should come from, and how that power is conceived. And if one presumes a Benjaminian reading, then there emerges a contradiction between the theoretical model and how the figure Paul Chan operates.

In his talk, Chan seems to identify the financial crisis as the Benjaminian "moment of danger," but that is highly problematic, since what is labeled a "crisis" in current discourse structurally corresponds with what Benjamin termed "the 'state of emergency' in which we live [, which] is not the exception but the rule."[35] It is but a part of what, according to Benjamin, is and has in fact always been "one single catastrophe,"[36] which constantly displaces the "real state of emergency" by calling for the sacrifice of *the now* to prevent the impending threat. For Benjamin, in other words, every moment is a "moment of danger"—a danger that "affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers."[37]

It is a very common argument these days that the economic crisis and the decline of the art market constitute a moment of opportunity.

34. For Benjamin writing in the 1930s, after his conversion to Marxism, to align oneself with Soviet Communism did not mean to contribute to a project with the goal of the liberation of the wage laborer, but to enact that liberation in the here and now.

35. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 257.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., 255.

But this is not the case unless the chrono-logic behind art practices (the practices concerning the production, exhibition, and discourse of art) and the social relations within the field change fundamentally. Otherwise, all that happens is, at best, a momentary displacement of monetary capital to "symbolic" or "cultural" capital, following the same accumulative chrono-logic: the belief that cultural capital accumulated now can be converted and cashed in at a later point. As opposed to this, what Benjamin calls "a real state of emergency" would mean a different chrono-logic: one of *Umkehr*, of turning around as non-movement, as rupture.

Chan, however, leaves the chrono-logic of accumulation and the existing power relations intact. His talk at the Vera List Center is paradigmatic in that respect: when Chan speaks about the recessional, about the moment the authorities leave the church, he is, himself, literally speaking from the pulpit. Theorizing rupture, Chan is maintaining the exchange relations and power relations that determine both this particular situation and the sociopolitical condition at large.

He showcases an intellectual performance, adding value to his art production by reaffirming his brand as an intellectual-critical artist. On a very literal level, the recessional acts as a seductive illustration for Chan's recent production—an *aesthetizised* high-theory as soundtrack for the *7 ~~Lights~~*.[38] The commodification of a thus *anaesthetized* theory runs counter to and annuls any Adornian criticality it might claim, as well as any emancipatory potential Benjamin would see in a mass cultural practice.

Speaking to a hall full of ticket holders who paid to hear him speak, Chan aligns himself with the power of the market and of cultural institutions to put himself into a position of mastery. The distance he thereby establishes between himself and the audience becomes even more apparent during the Q&A, when he interrupts interlocutors when they use "incorrect" vocabulary (for example, "specific" instead of "concrete") and seems more concerned with showcasing his knowledge in hermetic formulations to maintain distance, than with making it accessible and opening up discussion.

38. The *7 ~~Lights~~* series consists of projections of light as if falling through a window into the gallery space. In slow motion, shadows fall down or up toward the sky, creating an apocalyptic atmosphere. The individual "~~Lights~~" evoke different themes: the "1st ~~Light~~," with consumer goods and people falling, references the attacks on the World Trade Center; the "3rd ~~Light~~" is based on the iconography of the Last Supper.

It is true that Chan departs from the default form of the artist talk in a potentially interesting—or even rupturing—way, but his engagement with the parameters and cultural conventions conditioning the situation is extremely conservative—the thing conserved being his own power position.

Regarding the first point, one could argue that Chan's employment of the Adornian argument for a non-instrumental art (on which Chan bases his performative distinction between art and activist practice) is itself instrumental—a strategic move to legitimate a depoliticized spectacle production in front of a not insignificant number of critics and historians advocating a critical model of art. In fact, such an argument has more or less explicitly been put forth by André Rottmann in a recent interview.[39] Chan deflects this argument by interpreting it as a displacement of criticality with purity and asks: "What does it mean to work within a form of impurity without being a hypocrite, without being disabled? We think that impurity condemns us in our place. And so the question is: can you be impure and not be condemned to be in your place? Can it become dialectical? I would like to think it is possible. Because I don't want to be condemned to the life-order that we have been given. So the way out is through."[40] This last sentence echoes and sheds light on the last sentence in "The Spirit of Recession": to "endure through spirit, this is what I call the creative act today." And it points to the question of what desires produce a figure like Chan: Chan speaks to a widespread disillusionment with activism and committed art, to a sense of an all-pervasive market to which there is no outside, of being deeply implicated in the functioning of capitalism—to a feeling of guilt. And Chan promises redemption. Impurity as a stage toward redemption ("I don't want to be condemned to the life-order that we have been given") is a religious figure. But not the Benjaminian messianic one (for "the Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist";[41] bringing redemption as pure negation, he negates the worldly order—i.e., the Antichrist's—and thus repents all guilt). As opposed to this, Chan presents an essentially Christian

39. André Rottmann, "Family of Strangers," 153–65. In fact, Chan himself encourages this view when, in another interview with Martha Rosler, he claims that he sees his sustaining of this distinction as a performative work. Paul Chan and Martha Rosler, *Paul Chan, Martha Rosler*, 42.

40. André Rottmann, "Family of Strangers," 156.

41. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 255.

figure: Jesus Christ is impure (a God come human), but not condemned in his place; on the contrary, he brings redemption.

Chan's "impurity," however, means redemption only for him—and only in its most profane (i.e., monetary) sense. What effect—besides increasing Chan's visibility and market value—can this impurity hope to have? Don't the different elements of his practice eventually simply run parallel in frictionless coexistence? Chan runs with the hare and hunts with the hounds (and eventually also eats the roast): he writes criticism and theory, is involved in activism, and produces (and sells) spectacular works. There's something for everyone in this mix. But a dialectic is what Chan's discursive framing of his practice—the brand, if you will, that is Paul Chan—prevents. By strictly separating the different fields of his practice rhetorically, Chan does not allow the contrary impulses they participate in to collide. For Chan's "impurity" to become a dialectic, rather than to function as a neo-liberal defense mechanism, tensions would have to be given a stage to play out. Chan, however, always evades conflict. Whenever he is challenged, i.e., whenever he finds himself in the position of negating another position, he relativizes his own arguments and retreats,[42] forestalling indefinitely the possibility of resolution.

Eventually, however, a critique of the critical potential of Chan's art on grounds of its commodity form (as well as the argument Chan levels to deflect it) distracts from the crucial question: what is the conception of power put forth in this model?

Although Chan's metaphor of the recessional suggests a conception of emancipatory art not only as an aesthetic experience but as a *collective performance*, his own performance at the Vera List Center functions quite differently. The hierarchical relationship of artist and audience is kept in place. There is little attempt at disrupting the conventions and power structures that underwrite it in order to allow for the emergence of something other than what is prescribed by them. Chan's engagement with the audience, in fact, seems to have the opposite effect, to shut down rather than open up the discussion. (To a

42. See, for example, the interview with Martha Rosler cited earlier: "[Rosler]: I feel that people mean to hear you say, 'My art shouldn't be viewed with any political sensibility,' and I think that's blatantly not true in your work. Chan: I think I say it as a provocation. But it might be self-delusion too. Rosler: But you are confirming what people want to hear. Chan: Is that true? No, I don't think that is true. I think that within the specific performative aspects of where I am asked to speak, this is meant as a provocation." Paul Chan and Martha Rosler, *Paul Chan, Martha Rosler*, 42.

question that addresses his theoretical proposal, for example, Chan responds: "Boy, this extended Q&A might not be such a good idea.") This seems to result from a model of authorship as mastery and control from which Chan, despite his expressed desire to "turn away from the authority that captures [. . .] attention" cannot depart. Chan's clinging to the conventions of the individual singular author seems to get in the way of collective identification and action. Although he wants the emancipatory artistic act that heralds the community without *authority*, Chan subscribes to a model of *authorship* that participates in a "theogenic" concept of sovereignty conceived as being grounded in a selfness that suggests every "I can."[43] This sovereign power is diametrically opposed to the weak messianic force Chan invokes.

Recessional Aesthetics

The phenomenon Paul Chan, the attention he attracts, and the reactions this specific incidence of his practice generated, speak of the strong desire for new models of emancipatory art. But Chan's performance at the Vera List Center contradicts the messianic conception of art it invokes on a theoretical level. I therefore want to take up Chan's metaphor of the recessional and untangle it from its functioning there.

The image of "a church without authorities" suggests an ideal community; it evokes a Derridean "democracy to come."[44] A prac-

43. Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 11. With regard to Chan's image of a "church without authorities"—an emancipated community—Derrida's considerations of the aporetic construction of democracy as popular sovereignty come to mind: "Before any sovereignty of the state, of the nation state, of the monarch, or, in democracy, of the people, ipseity names a principle of legitimate sovereignty, the accredited or recognized supremacy of a power or force, a *kratos* or cracy," which is "the first, ultimate and supreme source of every 'reason of the strongest' as the right [droit] granted to force or the force granted to law [droit]." (12) It is "at the very least the power that gives itself its own law, its force of law." (11) Invoking the "autoaffection" of "Aristotle's Prime Mover"(15), Derrida states: "Sovereignty is round" (13) and within this closure, within the indivisibility of sovereignty, finds the reason for an auto-destructive logic that marks the aporetic structure of popular sovereignty.

44. Ibid., 86. "Democracy to come" suggests a protest "against all naïveté and every political abuse, every rhetoric that would present as a present or existing democracy, as a de facto democracy, what remains inadequate to the democratic demand," and a "force without force, incalculable singularity and calculable equality, commensurability and incommensurability, heteronomy and autonomy, indivisible sovereignty and divisible or shared sovereignty, an empty name, a despairing messianicity

tice following its calling could be termed *recessional aesthetics.*[45] It would then be an artistic practice of receptiveness toward the to-come,[46] of radical openness. As total negation of existing structures of power, it would be a non-sovereign force, deferring closure. *Recessional* to be read—as an adjective—in distinct opposition to the *accumulative* logic of capitalism, would then describe not a movement but a turning-around as standstill. *Recessional aesthetics* would be means without ends—in the strict sense—not as an "anyspacewhatever,"[47] but as radical negation of any accumulative chrono-logic.

This model of emancipatory art can help to understand artistic practices that operate very differently from Chan's. In the last part of my essay, I want to consider an instance of such practice, again taking the form of an "artist talk."

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or a messianicity in despair, and so on." Derrida understands democracy not as a historical form of government or as a specific constitution, but as a fundamental discursive negotiation of what democracy is, which itself has to prove itself to be democratic. Democracy, according to Derrida, is marked by a semantic void. It comes to us from the past, as a tradition and as a calling, a calling to realize democracy, which is yet to be fulfilled and to be defined. The "to come " points to this openness. Coming from the past, the word *democracy* places a demand on us in the present. Compare Benjamin's "weak messianic force."

45. Art historian and critic Hal Foster brought up the term "recessional aesthetics" in a seminar at the Whitney ISP in January 2009 devoted to Chan's text. In March 2009, Foster and David Joselit gave a talk titled "Recessional Aesthetics" at X, an alleged "not-for-profit" initiative spearheaded by gallerist Elizabeth Dee. The premise of this event—an examination of the opportunities offered by the current recession—however, in my mind, missed the point. In fact, the context of the talk seems to be a perfect example of the temporary displacement of financial to symbolic capital at a moment in which the market is down, but one that leaves the underlying accumulative chrono-logic intact. As opposed to this, the notion of recessional aesthetics that I want to argue for is precisely not an aesthetics at the moment of the recession, but an aesthetics that subscribes to and establishes a different chrono-logic—not an accumulative, but a recessional one. A recessional aesthetics that is not so much defined by the moment, as by its inherent chrono-logic.

46. The "to-come" is not to be mistaken for the defined goal of (essentially capitalist) accumulation, of improvement and extension of what is. It refers to the messianic event of the other that transcends the order that is. Compare note 44.

47. "theanyspacewhatever" was the title of a group exhibition of ten artists at the Guggenheim Museum in New York from October 24, 2008 through January 7, 2009. These artists, who "privilege experiential, situation-based work over discrete aesthetic objects," are associated with what, after Nicolas Bourriaud, is termed "relational aesthetics." See the Guggenheim's website: http://web.guggenheim.org/exhibitions/exhibition_pages/anyspace/exhibition.html and Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods, and Mathieu Copeland (Dijon, France: Les presses du réel, 2002).

Early October 2008: since the beginning of the academic year, participants of the Whitney ISP have been presenting their practice to their peers. So far, the same procedure has defined the process: the presenter sits at a desk across from all others, sets up a Macbook and presents documentary slides to an audience sitting in the darkened seminar room. She speaks about her work in a distanced, factual manner and tries to explain motives and intended meanings. The presentation's end is marked by a "Thank you" and a request for questions, which are then directed to the presenter.

When it's Emma Hedditch's turn, however, she asks the group to accompany her into the adjacent communal workspace. We all gather in a semicircle around her; she starts to narrate her artist bio. But things don't add up. One can hear (and some of us know) that she is from London, yet her story begins in Queens. When she goes on to talk about a specific project, she asks someone from the crowd, Ilya Lipkin, to help her display the work, and he begins to take posters from a box and tape them to the walls. Encouraged by Emma, I myself join in and tape one poster of a grim looking face above Luigi's desk, one of the curatorial fellows, then retreat into the circle of onlookers.

After a while another onlooker, Mattin, interrupts Emma with a question. When others join in, he reacts by posing questions directly to them, which generates a heated discussion that only stops when Emma asks all of us to return to the seminar room. There, she climbs onto the windowsill and holds up white sheets against the window. Ilya's voice can be heard from another room, reading a text about scarcity: "How can, could we make this work? Work is the wrong word. We are treating each other with care, curiosity, and willingness to share and support each other, in a time in time. We had the feeling that we don't have so much time and resources. But we do have time. Time is so generous. It is multiplying. We can make time for things as we unmake time, cut things short or stay longer, deciding when to end and when to start. We have enough resources. We do have enough. We have enough money and resources. Is it irresponsible to act like you don't have enough resources, money and resources, when you do?"[48] After about five minutes he is done and rejoins the group.

Mattin insists on returning every question or comment. Whenever

48. The text is actually part of Emma Hedditch's work *Scarcity*. (See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15wFT6ooVNw).

someone speaks, I wonder whether or not they are initiates as well. The situation is extremely tense. One can sense a longing for things to "return to normal," and at the same time, the opposite impulse to join the three and participate in the transgression. Throughout the performance, I have been wanting to be part of whatever was going on there. They enact and demonstrate solidarity. I cannot find a way to participate. Another non-initiate, David Baumfleck, spontaneously climbs up the windowsill, stands next to Emma, and helps her hold up the sheets. She takes his hand.

We sit around, not orderly in rows of chairs, but on the desk, the sill, leaning against walls. We talk with each other and to them, but there is no way to break through the performance, to make the three, who obviously must have planned this, step "out of character," distance themselves and speak about what they did from a distance. The performance, in other words, doesn't end.

Only very slowly is the situation normalized.

The three had planned nothing but not to comply with the unwritten rules that govern our actions and interactions in this space. Thus denaturalized, these rules could no longer provide the stability and safety of unaccountability they use to. To stick to the rules now meant a conscious decision. And it meant opting against other possibilities, such as those enacted by the three. Through their performance, they had transformed the given borders of the discursive space we inhabit into blank screens for all of us to project our desires. Exposing the contingency of those internalized rules that isolate and single us out as individuals to place us in competition, they had opened up a space of potentiality for all of us; all was equally possible and valid. The radical openness of the situation generated euphoric excitement, yet at the same time exerted an immense pressure by activating all those repressed and frustrated desires—for friendship, the free use of one's time, love, absolute presence—that an internalized professionalism forbids.

This provoked different reactions, from transgressive gestures like that of David who joined the three, to demonstrative annoyance in some. Frustration in the face of my own inhibitions coincided with a sense of empowerment. If my failure to free myself demonstrated the power of an internalized discipline, at the same time it made me feel the force that this discipline had to keep in check.

I am not citing this performance as the solution for emancipatory art or for its strong impact and relative "success."[49] Rather, I invoke it for its successful failure, attempting in doing so to problemize the very concept of a recessional aesthetics I traced above. After all, the situation was eventually normalized. If another performance should disrupt another situation in similar ways, it would have to start from scratch. And if this weren't so, if there was anything retained, wouldn't this re-inscribe the performance into an accumulative chrono-logic, corrupting its openness by eventually building another power structure?[50] It is difficult to embrace pure negation, constant undoing, *Umkehr* as standstill. And in the face of concrete suffering and injustice, can one really reject to build power structures, to contribute to a project that counters the dominant hegemony?

I am articulating my thoughts on recessional aesthetics in a format that produces precisely the authorial voice I meant to criticize earlier—a single voice putting forth a closed argument and subsuming it under a signature. I will be able to list this essay on future CVs and in biographical notes. I am formalizing my thoughts in a way that inscribes my argument into the accumulative logic of careers, of the creation of authorial identities, of the generation and accumulation of symbolic capital around them, that closes and fixes ideas and communicative processes and inscribes them into a proprietary logic. On the other hand, a signature, an identifiable address, and a discrete statement are arguably a precondition for communication, and I have faith that my argument circulates not only in a market, but also in a discursive realm, in which it will be read for what it also is: an attempt to connect and contribute to a discussion about the emancipatory potential of art.

49. The term, of course, fails to describe the relationship between an event that is not produced by any aim beyond itself and what comes after.

50. Derrida addresses this problematic in his systematic considerations of the relation of democracy and sovereignty. His concern is to seperate democracy from autonomy and sovereignty, which implies to seperate politics from ethics—or rather to grasp politics from the position of ethics. Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*.

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Works in the Exhibition

Fikret Atay
Rebels of the Dance, 2002
Video, color, sound; 10:52 minutes
Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

Kader Attia
Rochers Carrés, 2008
Nine chromogenic prints, 20 1/8 x 29 7/8 in. (51 x 76 cm) each
Collection of the artist; courtesy Savannah College of Art and Design, and Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne

Yael Bartana
Wild Seeds in America, 2008–09
Performance
First performed October 19, 2008 at Union Square, New York, as part of the exhibition *OURS: Democracy in the Age of Branding*, Sheila C. Johnson Design Center, Parsons The New School for Design

Ronnie Bass
2012, 2008
Video, color, sound; 4 minutes
Courtesy I-20 Gallery, New York

Ronnie Bass
The Sky Needs You Too, 2008
Video, color, sound; 8 minutes
Courtesy I-20 Gallery, New York

Johanna Billing
Where She Is At, 2001
Video, color, sound; 7:35 minutes, looped
Courtesy Hollybush Gardens, London

Johanna Billing
Project for a Revolution, 2000
Video, color, sound; 3:14 minutes, looped
Courtesy Hollybush Gardens, London

Keren Cytter
New Age, 2007
Super16mm film transferred to DVD, color, sound; 75 minutes
Collection of the artist

Kajsa Dahlberg
A Room of One's Own/A Thousand Libraries, 2006
Artist's book, 5 7/8 x 8 5/16 in. (15 x 21.1 cm)
Collection of the artist; courtesy Index, Stockholm

Maryam Jafri
Siege of Karthoum, 1884, 2006
Twenty-seven inkjet prints from photographic collages,
25 3/8 x 35 1/8 in. (64.5 x 89.2 cm) each
Collection of the artist

Tellervo Kalleinen & Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen
Complaints Choir (Birmingham), 2005
Video, color, sound; 8:54 minutes
Music by Mike Hurley, lyrics by the Choir
Collection of the artists

Tellervo Kalleinen & Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen
Complaints Choir (New York), 2009
Performance

Jennifer Phang
Half-Life, 2008
35mm film, 16mm film, and digital animation (made from
graphite drawings on paper) transferred to high-definition video,
color, sound; 116 minutes
Collection of the artist

Kateřina Šedá
There is Nothing There, 2003
Video, color, sound; 30:12 minutes; and paper documents in a vitrine,
72 x 36 x 5 in. (182.9 x 91.4 x 12.7 cm)
Courtesy Galleria Franco Soffiantino, Turin

Kevin Willmott
C.S.A.: The Confederate States of America, 2004
35mm film, 16mm film, and high-definition video, color and
black-and-white, sound; 89 minutes
Collection of the artist

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